

Workload and Casework review

Qualitative Review of Social Worker Caseload, Casework and
Workload Management

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Office of the Chief Social Worker



child, youth
and family

A service of the Ministry of Social Development



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Contents

	Acknowledgements.....	3
1	Executive summary	6
2	Introduction.....	22
3	Context and environment	25
4	Background to this review.....	38
5	Methodology	39
6	Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection	41
7	Decision making about Child, Youth and Family's work in care and protection	48
8	Interagency working	58
9	Working with mokopuna Māori.....	61
10	Social work practice	64
11	Cases and caseloads	79
12	Social worker resource allocation	89
13	Supervision and supervisors.....	97
14	Management, leadership and organisational culture.....	104
15	Information and data	108
16	Workforce development	112
17	Implementation.....	115
18	Summary of recommendations	117
19	Appendices	121
20	Bibliography	132

Tables

Table 1:	Referral methods and pathway into Child, Youth and Family	51
Table 2:	Further action required outcomes at each decision point, 2012/2013	54
Table 3:	Information gathered to support decision making.	55
Table 4:	Child, Youth and Family's performance against key timeliness measures	56
Table 5:	Modelling social workers needed if assessment volumes reduced, different scenarios	94

Figures

Figure 1:	High level overview of key care and protection volumes, 2012/2013.....	34
Figure 2:	Care and protection intakes by notifier type, 2012/2013	36

Figure 3: Overview of review methodology	39
Figure 4: Division of available social worker time spent on case related and non-case related activity	70
Figure 5: Breakdown of available work time for care and protection and youth justice social workers.....	71
Figure 6: Available social worker time spent in contact with children, young people and their family/whānau.....	72
Figure 7: Available social worker time spent on supervision, internal consultation, managerial support and training/learning	73
Figure 8: Available social worker time spent on documentation, administration, travel and escorting.....	75
Figure 9: Social worker views of caseload capacity	85
Figure 10: Social worker views of caseload complexity	85
Figure 11: Distribution of social worker caseloads by family unit and individual child or young person	87
Figure 12: Survey response from case holders to the question “ <i>When I get a complex case I feel supported to handle it</i> ”	98
Figure 13: Activity study results for care and protection and youth justice supervisors	101

Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed areas of inquiry	121
Appendix 2: Detailed methodology	123

1 Executive summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the qualitative review of social worker caseload, casework and workload management. The review was commissioned by the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development and led by the Office of the Chief Social Worker of Child, Youth and Family. The review involved extensive frontline staff participation and was undertaken in partnership with the New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA).
- 1.2 The review asked:
- *Are we working with the right cases and in the right timeframes to improve outcomes for New Zealand's most vulnerable children and young people?*
 - *Do we have the right tools and resources to enable us to meet the current demand for our service and to deliver quality social work practice?*
- 1.3 The review identified key areas for change and improvement in systems and practice. It aimed to deliver better quality social work that makes a positive difference to the lives of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Background

- 1.4 An on-going process of critical self-analysis, continual learning and improvement is necessary to ensure Child, Youth and Family keeps the most vulnerable children and young people at the centre of its work, and makes a real difference when and where it is most needed.
- 1.5 The decision to undertake this self-review was in response to concerns about factors impeding quality social work and the effect it was having on vulnerable children and young people. In particular, frontline staff, monitoring reports and some external agencies were raising concerns about the impact large volumes of cases was having on quality practice.
- 1.6 In addition, a review of a serious case in March 2013 evaluated the environment social workers were operating in. Consequently, the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development commissioned the Office of the Chief Social Worker to carry out an in-depth review of caseloads and workloads in terms of their impact on quality practice and results.

Review focus and scope

- 1.7 This review focused on how Child, Youth and Family can improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people by better understanding how it manages its business.
- 1.8 It examined how Child, Youth and Family works internally and externally, and how it can best use its resources to have the biggest impact on practice and services.
- 1.9 The review honestly and openly evaluated key areas for improvement. It was not an overview of all the work of Child, Youth and Family, but a deliberate focus on where gains could be made. It looked specifically at:
- key practice areas, systems and organisational drivers that affect caseloads, workloads and workload management

- the way resources could be deployed alongside those of other agencies and partners, so that practice and services make the most difference for the most vulnerable children, young people and their families.
- 1.10 The review acknowledged that some excellent practice occurs in Child, Youth and Family, with some outstanding social workers and a strategic vision that reflects a commitment to quality social work practice.
- 1.11 The unprecedented level of frontline engagement with this review will provide a strong platform for improvements in organisational performance and practice quality. Around 800 staff members took part and more than 800 cases were reviewed.
- 1.12 The review also benefited from an Independent Expert Advisory Panel to oversee and comment on methodology, findings and recommendations. The panel included Dr Nicola Atwool (University of Otago), Mike Munnelly (Barnardos New Zealand), John Fluke (University of Colorado, US) and Nigel Richardson (Leeds City Council, UK). In addition, a range of stakeholders was consulted across government departments, non-government providers, iwi and the Office of the Children's Commissioner.
- 1.13 Although this review was internally focused, it acknowledged that the wider environment has a significant impact on social worker workload and caseloads and on the expectations of new, collaborative, outcomes-driven ways of working. Key background factors include:
- A large increase in the demand for Child, Youth and Family services. Child, Youth and Family has dealt with a six-fold increase in its reported number of notifications over the past 15 years.
 - A significant improvement programme within Child, Youth and Family since 2006. The organisation has made considerable progress with the timeliness of its services, the implementation of social work processes and the delivery of key outputs. This review reflects a logical and necessary shift in emphasis towards quality practices and services focused where they are most needed.
 - Significant change in the wider landscape around vulnerable children. There have been reforms across government and the wider social sector in which agencies must work with each other, communities and iwi to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- 1.14 The review considered:
- a) Key factors that significantly affect staff workloads and the perceptions of workload demands, including:
 - the volume and complexity of cases
 - the level and quality of the work being done currently
 - the number and distribution of social workers across sites, and the role of support staff.
 - b) Organisational systems and processes that support the effective management of social worker's caseloads, casework and workloads, including:
 - staff allocation models
 - management information reports
 - management and supervision systems
 - how well CYRAS, Child, Youth and Family's primary electronic case management system, meets the organisation's needs.

- c) The cross-agency factors that have an impact on the demand for social work services and Child, Youth and Family's ability to manage this demand.
 - d) The different approaches required for appropriate Māori and Pacific models of practice.
 - e) Aspects of organisational culture and leadership which influence ways of working and enable quality social work practice.
- 1.15 An explicit examination of staff skills, knowledge, experience and professional confidence was out of the scope of this review. However, by default, the review gathered information related to staff capability, which affects workload issues and the quality of social work delivered. This information has informed several of the recommendations in this review.

Key findings and recommendations

Overview

- 1.16 Overall, this review identified that effective leadership, support systems and processes alongside manageable workloads make a significant difference to a social worker's ability to deliver high quality practice. Quality practice includes spending ample time with children and whānau, consulting and collaborating with other agencies and professionals, and supportive, challenging professional supervision. All these factors lead to better outcomes and have a real impact on the lives of vulnerable children and their families.
- 1.17 The review highlighted a number of key areas for change and improvement in Child, Youth and Family's systems and practice.
- 1.18 More priority needs to be given to quality, professional engagement with children, young people and their families. Child, Youth and Family needs to ensure children, young people and families are always seen, engaged with, listened to, and fully involved in decisions about their own lives.
- 1.19 To do this, social workers need more capacity and ability to build effective, culturally responsive relationships. They need to be able to prioritise their time to do the activities that make the most difference to children and young people. These activities include engaging with children, young people and their whānau, quality professional supervision, and consulting and collaborating with other agencies. Child, Youth and Family needs to set strong guidelines and benchmarks about priority activities for social workers, alongside benchmarks for effective and manageable caseloads.
- 1.20 Child, Youth and Family also needs to review the caseloads of a number of social workers, and to investigate ways to reduce social workers' administration and desk time. Ultimately, to consistently deliver quality work, Child, Youth and Family will need to consider increasing the number of frontline care and protection social workers available for the most vulnerable children and young people, and reducing the work they are currently managing.
- 1.21 To keep the focus on the most vulnerable children and young people (those who need a statutory response as opposed to broader family support), Child, Youth and Family needs to clarify its role and core business. It needs to strengthen its ability to

build relationships, gather information and work inclusively and collaboratively alongside other agencies.

- 1.22 Child, Youth and Family's data and information systems need to be modernised and simplified, to better project workloads and future resource needs. They also need to paint a more sophisticated picture of the needs and risks of the children and young people Child, Youth and Family works with.
- 1.23 The timeliness of Child, Youth and Family's assessments is excellent. In 2012/2013, 95 to 99 per cent of responses to notifications that required further action were completed on time. However, the review found this came at the cost of other aspects of quality practice. Current performance targets, risk management, quality assurance mechanisms and leadership behaviour should be re-visited to balance the current focus on quantitative targets with more emphasis on measures of outcome and quality in social work practice.
- 1.24 A single, integrated Ministry-wide action and change management plan will be needed to drive the necessary change within Child, Youth and Family and across partnerships. The plan will need to dovetail with other strategic work within Child, Youth and Family, across the Ministry and the social sector, including the Children's Action Plan, Investing in Services for Outcomes, Simplification, the Data Analysis Hub and the Four Year Investment Strategy.
- 1.25 Given the scope and depth of the recommendations of this review, Child, Youth and Family's operating model will need to be re-designed to support the action plan, to align with contemporary needs and risks, and to promote the delivery of quality social work practice.
- 1.26 Child, Youth and Family also needs to view its work in the context of significant change in the wider landscape around vulnerable children. Government reforms place accountability on a range of agencies to work far more closely to improve results for vulnerable children. Child, Youth and Family has a key part to play. Its ability to clearly define its role and to work more collaboratively with more partners at every point will be crucial. The recommendations in this review aim to reflect this.
- 1.27 This report sets out the reviews key findings and recommendations under the following themes:
 1. Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection
 2. Decision making about Child, Youth and Family's work in care and protection
 3. Interagency working
 4. Working with mokopuna Māori
 5. Social work practice
 6. Cases and caseloads
 7. Social worker resource allocation
 8. Supervision and supervisors
 9. Management, leadership and organisational culture
 10. Information and data
 11. Workforce development
 12. Implementation.

Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection

- 1.28 Child, Youth and Family is the government agency that has the legal power to intervene to protect and help children who are at risk of being harmed, ill-treated or abused or who have serious problem behaviour. Child, Youth and Family works with the Police and the Courts in dealing with young offenders under the youth justice

system. It provides residential and care services for children in need of care and protection and for young offenders. As part of the Ministry of Social Development, Child, Youth and Family also has a role in funding community organisations working with children, young people and their families to support the community's role in protecting and helping children.

- 1.29 The review found that overall there was a clearer understanding of Child, Youth and Family's role in youth justice than in care and protection. Operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and role in undertaking its care and protection responsibilities are currently being described, interpreted and applied broadly. As a result increasing numbers of children are being directed towards Child, Youth and Family when many could be better supported by other agencies.
- 1.30 Interviews with partner agencies found it was difficult to establish a clear consensus on Child, Youth and Family's core mandate and role. Many said their understanding came from local knowledge and their own experience, and they believed Child, Youth and Family did have a role in lower risk situations because there was no alternative support in their community.
- 1.31 The current broad understanding of Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection means it is assessing referrals that either don't warrant statutory intervention or require a response outside of or in addition to what Child, Youth and Family should provide (for example, support with parenting, parental mental health or parental use of alcohol or drugs).
- 1.32 In addition, the review found that within the guidelines on which social workers base their decisions, the definition of Child, Youth and Family's role is open to interpretation. As a result, a greater-than-necessary number of notifications receive further action by Child, Youth and Family at the initial intake stage. When reviewers evaluated notifications using a more detailed description of Child, Youth and Family's role than that currently available to staff, they found 15 per cent fewer cases would have progressed through to a Child, Youth and Family site for further consideration. More than half of the staff members who took part in this review said that clearer guidance on Child, Youth and Family's core business would help their decision making about new notifications.
- 1.33 Clearer operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and core business will have an impact in several areas. It will determine which vulnerable children and young people have needs and risks that require a statutory child protection response, and which would be better supported by a non-statutory response. It will allow social workers to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable, and will clarify the role of other agencies and community partners in supporting children and young people with lower needs. This means not only does Child, Youth and Family need to change its behaviour, but also any agency coming into contact with children, across both government and non-government sectors, need to rethink their support for vulnerable children.

Recommendation 1

- a) In the short term, more accurately define and articulate Child, Youth and Family's operational mandate and core business in care and protection to:
- reflect and target its focus on assessing and protecting the most high need and the most vulnerable children and young people
 - provide greater clarity and guidelines for social workers and referring agencies as to which children and young people may require a statutory

child protection response, and which would be better supported by a non-statutory response.

- b) Work with government and non-government partners to develop clear and commonly understood definitions of needs, risks and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people to:
- provide clarity for both Child, Youth and Family social workers and partner agencies, enhancing the ability to work collaboratively and provide a range of services around children with multiple and varying levels of need
 - support and assist the strategic direction of the Vulnerable Children's Board in the development of both improved capacity and capability to work effectively with vulnerable children and their families across all sectors – both government and non-government
 - re-negotiate contracts with non-government providers to offer more services and support for children who are currently directed to Child, Youth and Family.

Decision making about Child, Youth and Family's work in care and protection

- 1.34 Social workers make complex and difficult decisions every day in uncertain, stressful, often hostile and unstable situations. They need to make judgements based on many factors which do not always lead to clear-cut conclusions about risk to children. They also have to understand and take into account the unique situation of every different family they work with. Robust information from a number of sources is a key factor in the effectiveness of these decisions.
- 1.35 Social workers at the initial intake point at the National Contact Centre need to make decisions on a high volume of cases. The review found the structure of the intake process, alongside limited time allocations, made it hard to gather additional information for more effective decision making. With the benefit of further local knowledge and information, many of the initial decisions were subsequently changed at site level.
- 1.36 Reviewers found scope for improved decision making at intake with better referral information, including conversations with referrers in all cases.
- 1.37 At all key decision points following intake, the review highlighted the need for stronger information gathering practices to improve decision making. This included communication with parents and caregivers, and health and education professionals. Face to face contact with the child or young person needs to be the top priority and should be an imperative in every safety assessment.
- 1.38 The sheer volume of referrals affects the way staff respond to referrals. Stronger information gathering practices need to be allocated sufficient time and resources, as well as a clearer definition of Child, Youth and Family's role. (These points are addressed in Recommendations 1 and 6.)
- 1.39 It is also important to note that key performance indicators (KPIs) drive the way social workers respond to reports of concern and prioritise their work. Time and process-focused targets are useful in ensuring the timely completion of large numbers of assessments but can also adversely affect the quality of practice and the priority social workers give to contact and engagement with children and young people, parents, caregivers, and other agencies.

Recommendation 2

In line with the definition of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and core business in care and protection (Recommendation 1), strengthen social workers' decision-making capacity and ability at intake, initial and full assessments, intervention, review and case closure:

- a) Re-visit the current intake structure, design and practices. Build stronger expectations and guidelines for pro-active information gathering, conversations and collaboration at all key decision points, including direct engagement with children and young people, whānau and caregivers, as well as with health, education and other relevant agencies.

Interagency working

- 1.40 Effective, focused interagency working is linked to more effective intervention and better results for children. In New Zealand, there is a growing recognition both in practice and in research that the needs of vulnerable children are complex, multi-faceted and cannot be solved by one agency alone. Government reforms under the Vulnerable Children Bill place accountability on a range of agencies to work far more closely to improve results for vulnerable children.
- 1.41 Within that context, as the agency which focuses on those who are the most vulnerable of all, Child, Youth and Family needs to build its capacity and capability for collaborative working and information sharing.
- 1.42 The review recognised that Child, Youth and Family's new assessment framework and new Strategic Plan have laid the groundwork for more cross-agency working. The review found social workers currently spend only a small amount of time consulting, sharing information and working collaboratively with other agencies. From referral onwards, there needs to be more quality information gathering, conversations and collaborative planning between key people and agencies in each vulnerable child's life.
- 1.43 As addressed in Recommendation 1, Child, Youth and Family needs to clarify and promote an understanding of its mandate and core business among government and non-government agencies. It needs to actively build relationships and work alongside other agencies, working out who is best placed to support the needs of each child and its family. The implications of this mean far better information sharing across agencies and other agencies taking a greater share of responsibility towards providing help and support for vulnerable children. This needs an immediate focus to enable constructive interagency conversations about co-ordinating responses at a local level for the most vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendation 3

Build Child, Youth and Family's standard practices and culture around pro-active engagement with other agencies at all key decision points from referral to closure. This includes:

- a) stronger expectations at frontline and national levels to work with other agencies, professionals and organisations, share information, plan and deliver connected support for children and young people
- b) leading and collaborating to develop national interagency care and protection policies, procedures and standards that define how agencies will

work together and share information (with clarity on legal aspects of information sharing)

- c) enhanced staff learning and development in collaborative working.

Working with mokopuna Māori

- 1.44 Mokopuna Māori make up about half of the children and young people Child, Youth and Family works with. Child, Youth and Family's strategic plan – *mā mātou, mā tātou*¹ – sets out a commitment to quality social work practice, a culturally responsive approach to working with Māori, enhancing children's participation and community partnerships. To improve its cultural responsiveness, Child, Youth and Family recently launched a significant programme of work, and is developing a culturally-based practice framework for publication in 2014.
- 1.45 This review considered the extent to which social workers actively sought the advice of a kaumatua or matai in relation to Māori or Pacific children and their whānau, where that would support quality practice. (This is in the context of no current formal requirement for staff to do this.) The review found there is limited or inconsistent social work practice based on cultural needs. Currently, a number of Māori and Pacific staff members are giving cultural support to their peers over and above their own responsibilities.
- 1.46 The review highlighted the need for explicit policies, procedures and systems to support staff to work in a culturally responsive way with mokopuna Māori, their whānau, hapū and iwi, which is a strong intention in current legislation. The additional time and expertise required for culturally responsive practice also needs to be taken into account in caseloads and resourcing. To build on its existing commitment to cultural responsiveness, it will be important for Child, Youth and Family to continue to strengthen and seek new relationships with iwi, Māori social service providers and communities.

Recommendation 4

Ensure that Child, Youth and Family's culturally-based practice and strategic frameworks include:

- a) policies, procedures and systems to support staff and develop practitioner and manager capability in culturally responsive practice
- b) recognition of the time and expertise required for culturally responsive practice
- c) partnerships with iwi, Māori social service providers and communities
- d) culturally responsive governance arrangements.

Social work practice

- 1.47 One of the factors that led to this review was the amount of staff feedback about the number of tasks they were being asked to do, and the impact this had on the amount of quality contact with children or young people and their families.
- 1.48 There is no doubt that consistent, effective relationships between social workers and vulnerable children, young people and their families lead to better results. All report that they want to strengthen their relationships. Research and evidence in New

¹ www.cyf.govt.nz/documents/about-us/publications/reports/our-strategy-final.pdf

Zealand and abroad highlights the benefits of regular and frequent face-to-face contact. Social workers perceive the time spent directly with children and young people is one of the most important and valuable uses of their time.

- 1.49 High quality supervision, consultation and planning are also important parts of quality social work. Alongside more time with children or young people and whānau, most social workers report they would like to dedicate more time to these activities.
- 1.50 This review examined the division of social worker time, and its impact on the quality of practice social workers can deliver to vulnerable children and young people.
- 1.51 The review found social workers need to spend more time working directly with children, young people and whānau to build the quality relationships that lead to long-term solutions.
- 1.52 On average, a care and protection social worker spends nearly 50 per cent of their time on documentation, administration, travel and escorting and 25 per cent of their time communicating with children or young people, families and whānau (including face-to-face contact, phone calls, emails, texts or family group conferences). Professional supervision and internal and external consultation take 5 per cent of their time. Training takes around 5 per cent, and non-case related activities such as meetings and reporting around 9 per cent. A similar picture emerges for youth justice social workers. However, it should be noted that care and protection social workers divide their time between more children and young people than their youth justice counterparts. (Care and protection social workers typically work with at least twice as many children and young people. This means that, while the total time recorded was similar, individual children and young people in youth justice would have received a greater proportion of this time than those in care and protection.)
- 1.53 When workload and time pressures increase, time with children, young people and their whānau is one of the first things to drop off. The review found that Child, Youth and Family's policies, practice guidelines, strategic documents and leadership behaviour need to give more precedence to activities that make the greatest impact on quality outcomes. In particular, priority needs to be given to direct engagement with the child, young person and whānau, as well as quality supervision and planning. New Zealand reflects an international pattern in statutory social work where practitioners struggle to get enough time with children and families while also meeting the bureaucratic, recording and reporting requirements of the organisation.
- 1.54 KPIs also send messages about what activities are most important. Child, Youth and Family's current performance indicators focus strongly on reporting and timeliness – that is, quantity measures as opposed to quality measures. (This is addressed in Recommendation 10.)
- 1.55 The review found Child, Youth and Family also needs to take into account the differing complexity of cases and the impact this has on social worker time, as this would enable workloads to be distributed and monitored more effectively. (This is addressed in Recommendation 6.)
- 1.56 Given the complexity and range of social workers' tasks, there is also a case for creating specialised roles to recognise the different approaches and skills needed for:
- reactive, urgent and demand-driven work such as at intake and initial assessment
 - planned and systematic work such as interventions and support for children in care.

- 1.57 When asked about the one thing they would change to make managing workloads easier, the third most common response after more staff and more manageable workloads was for a more integrated and streamlined IT/recording system to reduce the impact of documentation on their time. (This is addressed in Recommendation 10.)

Recommendation 5

Social workers need to be able to focus on the activities that make the most difference to vulnerable children and young people:

- a) Develop a single set of practice standards and priorities focused on quality social work and reinforced by a quality assurance framework and organisational leadership. Particular emphasis should be given to direct contact with children and families, supervision, interagency work and consultation.
- b) Develop and test specialised social work services that operate alongside other agencies to:
 - meet the unique needs of particular groups (for example, children in care, disabled children)
 - strengthen specialised approaches (for example, planned and systematic support, urgent and demand-driven response).
- c) Identify efficiencies in case related documentation and administration, including IT systems, to reduce duplicated or unnecessary effort and time.
- d) Clarify the role and use of support or administrative staff to ensure their skills are used effectively to free up social workers for time with children and young people, and other priority activities.

Cases and caseloads

- 1.58 Increasing work pressure has a significant adverse impact on quality social work practice. Recommendations 2 and 5 both highlight the need to prioritise quality activity in KPIs and practice guidelines. However, Child, Youth and Family must also ensure its social workers can reasonably achieve the amount of work they are asked to do. To do this, Child, Youth and Family needs to more effectively and equitably measure, monitor and distribute workloads.
- 1.59 Currently, workloads are measured by the number of cases each social worker has. In youth justice a case is more clearly defined, usually as an individual child or young person. However, in care and protection a case is generally defined as a family, and does not take into account the number of children in that family, the complexity of the family's needs or the impact this has on social worker time. Therefore there is considerable variability between caseloads. One-quarter of care and protection social workers are holding 19 or more cases (or families) and almost three-quarters are managing caseloads of 19 or more children.
- 1.60 The review found that many managers at a local level have developed their own approaches to caseload management, but Child, Youth and Family needs to support them with clear organisational policy and guidelines. It also needs to improve data systems to allow effective caseload analysis and monitoring at both local and organisational levels.
- 1.61 There is an opportunity for Child, Youth and Family to formalise guidelines about what constitutes a case and what is an appropriate caseload. It also needs to consider the

types of factors that need to be taken into account when determining the number and weight of cases a social worker can reasonably manage.

Recommendation 6

Define and actively manage caseload volumes:

- a) Re-set the measure for care and protection caseload to account for:
 - the number of children being actively worked with
 - the nature and complexity of the work, including cultural needs
 - practical considerations such as remoteness, travelling times etc.
- b) Develop guidelines around co-working and cover arrangements and take these into account when measuring caseload.
- c) Create organisational policy, standards and guidelines on manageable and appropriate caseloads alongside data and management systems to support, implement, monitor and review them.
- d) As a priority, assess social workers' caseloads and safely reduce those that are unreasonably high.

Social worker resource allocation

- 1.62 To reach a conclusion about the suitability of current casework, caseloads and workloads, this review investigated:
 - the extent to which social workers are working more than their contracted hours
 - whether current staffing levels are sufficient to deliver quality social work
 - whether the way Child, Youth and Family allocates resources allows it to prioritise effectively and make transparent trade-offs when workload exceeds social worker capacity.
- 1.63 Based on high level projections and models of the time and resource needed to deliver high quality social work, this review found an imbalance between staffing levels in care and protection and the demand for services.
- 1.64 The review has already identified a number of options that will help address this imbalance. For example:
 - Focus Child, Youth and Family's core business to reflect its role in child care and protection with the most vulnerable of children and young people (Recommendation 1).
 - Build more effective collaborative relationships with organisations which have a role in supporting vulnerable families and their children (Recommendation 3).
 - Identify and improve duplicated, unnecessary or inefficient tasks or processes. Clarify and maximise the role and use of support staff (Recommendation 5).
- 1.65 Alongside these options, Child, Youth and Family will need to consider increasing its numbers of care and protection social workers.
- 1.66 It also needs a way to effectively measure, evaluate and monitor local and national demand, workloads and the effect of new policies or practice changes on social worker capacity. This is key to ensuring the necessary resources, including administration and support, are in the right place at the right time.

Recommendation 7

- a) Increase the number of frontline care and protection social workers in line with current needs, achievable demand management and the delivery of quality social work standards.
- b) Develop a new model for systematically monitoring, reviewing and then projecting the number of social workers Child, Youth and Family will need over time, based on patterns of demand, volumes and complexity, procedural requirements, and local factors such as geography.
- c) Review the national distribution of social work capacity in line with the new model.
- d) Ensure all new policy and practice standards for social workers include an evaluation of the resources and capacity to deliver the changes.

Supervision and supervisors

- 1.67 Social work is demanding and complex. Regular and well-managed supervision is a vital part of quality child-centred social work practice. It is important for all social workers, but it is especially valuable to support and develop less experienced staff. It challenges and supports social workers, allowing them to reflect on their performance, solve issues in everyday practice, build resilience and use their experiences to strengthen their work.
- 1.68 Supervisors need to be experts in quality social work practice and to challenge and support staff to demonstrate these behaviours. This review found that supervision is the primary form of casework support for three-quarters of Child, Youth and Family social workers. However, a third of the staff felt the frequency and quality of their supervision did not meet their needs. Case reviews showed that not all social workers consistently receive timely, high quality supervision. Cultural advice and support was not evident in many cases where it was needed.
- 1.69 The barriers to effective, supportive and consistent professional supervision include:
- Caseloads – supervisors and team leaders who are taking on frontline casework for their teams have less time for their primary role. (This is addressed in Recommendation 7.)
 - A lack of clarity among supervisors and staff around the purpose and function of professional supervision.
 - A lack of capability of some supervisors to deliver effective supervision, and a lack of professional development to progress staff into supervision positions.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen quality social work practice in Child, Youth and Family by addressing the barriers to effective and consistent professional supervision:

- a) Review and clarify the purpose and function of supervision for Child, Youth and Family including clear aims, standards and expectations for supervision.
- b) Invest in and support supervisors to ensure they are actively and effectively managing the quality of social work practice. Specific action should focus on:
 - clearly defining the skill set and standards needed in a supervisor role

- role clarity and accountabilities for supervisors, site managers and practice leaders, ensuring supervisors focus on supporting practice rather than delivering it
- effective succession planning and recruitment processes into supervisor roles
- professional development and quality assurance to build supervisor performance.

Management, leadership and organisational culture

- 1.70 The plans and actions of leaders and managers define the culture that translates into successful child-centred practice focused on quality outcomes for children and young people.
- 1.71 Throughout the review it was clear social workers and managers are very committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable children and young people. Many staff members go extra miles to improve the wellbeing of the children and young people they work with. Among managers and leaders there is strong support for the organisation's strategic vision – *mā mātou mā tātou* – which sets out a commitment to quality social work practice. However, in the current system and context they were struggling to put these principles into practice.
- 1.72 This review considered the effectiveness of management in strategically managing workloads and resources so that a culture of quality practice can occur. In particular it considered:
- how risks and issues about workloads and resources were managed and escalated
 - how absences were planned and covered
 - what managers did when work demands exceeded capacity.
- 1.73 The review also looked at how effectively Child, Youth and Family supports its managers with organisational drivers that promote quality practice.
- 1.74 The review found many sites struggled to cover for absent or seconded social workers. This work was often picked up by a supervisor or by already fully-loaded colleagues who covered only the most urgent activities.
- 1.75 The review found many managers were primarily focused on internal reporting, managing operational issues and immediate case related issues. Organisationally, managers were not always making effective use of data and analysis to support forward planning. Several key factors contribute to the current environment:
- There is a need for integrated, quality data to support strategic decisions and management actions. (This is addressed in Recommendation 10.) There is also a need to build management capability in this area.
 - The current performance management approach is strongly focused on KPI targets, and this is driving a process-oriented culture in social work. Timeliness of social work processes is important. However, the review found a better balance is needed between measures of output (how many, how quickly, how often) and measures of outcome and quality (how accurate and comprehensive was the assessment, how good was the plan, what were the end results for the child).
 - Organisationally, risk management is strongly focused on operational and immediate case related risk, absorbing a significant amount of manager time, and taking the focus away from strategic planning to deliver quality practice.

Recommendation 9

- a) As an organisation, define the leadership behaviour and organisational culture that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice in line with Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision.
- b) At all levels, strengthen managers' capability and accountability for:
 - leadership behaviour that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice
 - managing change in practice and policy in relation to workload
 - effectively using data and analysis to drive strategic planning and decisions
 - making strategic decisions and escalating risks about workloads and resources before they become unmanageable for social workers, teams or sites.
- c) Re-balance key organisational drivers including:
 - key performance indicators – balance the current emphasis on quantitative targets with a greater focus on measures of outcome and quality
 - organisational risk management – balance the current emphasis on immediate case related and operational risks with more focus on strategic and capacity/capability risks.
- d) Create a flexible and responsive pool of external social workers and support workers to cover for those absent through significant illness, training periods or secondments.

Information and data

- 1.76 High quality, relevant, integrated, usable data and information supports strong strategic oversight and decision making. Good data is key to strategically managing workloads and caseloads.
- 1.77 Across the Ministry of Social Development, of which Child, Youth and Family is a part, major work programmes are underway to simplify and modernise processes and systems, and to integrate data into a single data analysis hub. The findings in this review support the need for this work. Clear themes to emerge from this review are:
 - Child, Youth and Family's data systems need to be modernised and simplified.
 - The data available to managers needs to be clearer, more accessible and relevant.
 - Social workers and managers need more integrated, detailed data to better understand the needs and circumstances of children and young people.
- 1.78 CYRAS was designed as Child, Youth and Family's primary case management system. In addition to capturing a record of involvement with a child and family, CYRAS forms Child, Youth and Family's primary source of data for information and reporting. This data is extracted and summarised for managers by the separate Te Pakoro system. Over time, the needs, scope and character of Child, Youth and Family's work have changed. As CYRAS and Te Pakoro have been adapted over the years, they have become unwieldy and difficult to use.
- 1.79 Other data systems are also complex, making it difficult to access useful data. For example, complexities in the human resources data make it hard to identify the

actual number of social workers holding care and protection caseloads at any given time.

- 1.80 The recommendations of this review support the significant Ministry-wide work that is already underway across organisational systems and integrated data collection and analysis.

Recommendation 10

- a) Improve the integration, accessibility and reliability of information available to managers to support strategic and operational decision making.
- b) Ensure information is provided in a way that enables users to understand the meaning and implications of the data, and changes or patterns over time.
- c) Increase Child, Youth and Family's current capability and capacity around data and information analysis at all levels.

Workforce development

- 1.81 Child, Youth and Family has many outstanding social workers. However, many managers identify challenges in finding or retaining the required numbers of suitably qualified, skilled and experienced practitioners.

- 1.82 An explicit examination of staff skills, knowledge, experience and professional confidence was out of the scope of this review. However, by default, the review gathered information related to staff capability. It highlighted several areas where Child, Youth and Family could develop its workforce to deliver higher quality social work. These include:

- The effectiveness and consistency of supervision and on-the-job development, especially for newer staff. (This is addressed in Recommendation 9.)
- A need for a culturally responsive practice tools and guidance to work effectively with Māori, alongside building staff and manager capability in this key area. (This is addressed in Recommendation 4.)
- The quality and relevance of education and training in social work qualifying courses.
- The ability of managers and social workers to navigate complexity and conflict.

Recommendation 11

- a) Refresh Child, Youth and Family's strategy for recruiting, retaining and developing a quality, skilled and committed workforce, including succession planning, performance management, professional knowledge development and flexible working arrangements.
- b) Work closely with universities and social work educators and the Social Work Registration Board to promote standards of social work education, knowledge and training that equip staff for the reality and complexity of care and protection.
- c) Focus staff and leadership development on the key goals in Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision – namely, quality social work practice, responsiveness to Māori cultural needs, children's participation, interagency partnerships and leadership.

Implementation

- 1.83 A single, integrated action and change management plan will need to be designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated to drive the necessary changes within Child, Youth and Family and across social sector partnerships. No single recommendation stands alone. Given the scope, depth and inter-connectedness of the recommendations, Child, Youth and Family's operating model will need to be re-designed to support the action plan, to align with contemporary needs and risks affecting children, and to promote the delivery of quality social work practice.

Recommendation 12

The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development should oversee a Ministry-wide action plan, led by the Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family, and based on recommendations from this review:

- a) The review's diverse and inter-connected recommendations need to be integrated into a single, co-ordinated, holistic change management plan that dovetails with other strategic work within Child, Youth and Family and across the Ministry, including the Children's Action Plan, Investing in Services for Outcomes, Simplification, the Data Analysis Hub and the Four Year Investment Strategy.
- b) The Children's Commissioner and Expert Advisory Panel should be invited to monitor and review progress on the plan and the impact it has on quality social work practice.
- c) Proactive and co-ordinated change and implementation plans need to be delivered in consultation with the Public Service Association.
- d) To support the scope of change recommended, Child, Youth and Family should re-design its operating model to align with contemporary needs.

2 Introduction

- 2.1 This report sets out the findings of the qualitative review of social worker caseload, casework and workload management, commissioned by the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development. It was led by Child, Youth and Family's Office of the Chief Social Worker and was undertaken in partnership with the New Zealand Public Service Association (PSA).
- 2.2 An on-going process of critical self-analysis, continual learning and improvement is vital to ensure Child, Youth and Family keeps vulnerable children at the centre of its work, and makes a real difference when and where it is most needed. The decision to undertake this self-review was in response to concerns about factors impeding quality social work and the effect it was having on vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.3 This review focused on evaluating and better understanding specific key areas of Child, Youth and Family's practices and systems, and on the way it deploys its resources. In particular, it investigated the perception that high social worker workloads and caseloads were affecting the quality of social work children and their families received.
- 2.4 The review focused on how Child, Youth and Family could improve outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people by better understanding how the organisation managed its business. It sought to honestly and openly evaluate key areas for improvement. It was not intended to be a balanced overview of the work of Child, Youth and Family but rather deliberate focus on areas where the greatest improvement and change could be achieved.
- 2.5 The level of frontline engagement with the review was unprecedented. Around 800 staff members took part. The review acknowledges that some excellent practice already occurs in the service, with some outstanding social workers. It identifies key areas for change and improvement, both in systems and practice, to deliver better quality social work and to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable children.
- 2.6 The review asked:
- *Are we working with the right cases and in the right timeframes to improve outcomes for New Zealand's most vulnerable children and young people?*
 - *Do we have the right tools and resources to enable us to meet the current demand for our service and to deliver quality social work practice?*
- 2.7 The review considered key factors that significantly affect staff workloads and the perceptions of workload demands on staff:
- The **volume, type and complexity of cases** being managed by Child, Youth and Family's frontline staff, and whether the organisation was working with the right cases based on practice and legal definitions of Child, Youth and Family's core business.
 - The **level and quality of the work** undertaken within cases, and whether Child, Youth and Family was working in a way to maximise the impact of its work on children and young people.
 - The **number and distribution of staff** across sites, and whether Child, Youth and Family had the right number of frontline social work staff in the right locations to manage the demand for its service.

- 2.8 The review also investigated the organisational systems and processes that support the effective management of social worker caseloads, casework and workloads. These included staff allocation models, management information reports, management and supervision systems and CYRAS² functionality. Therefore the review also considered:
- Whether Child, Youth and Family had the **right systems, tools and information** to effectively manage the frontline social worker resource in a way that supported quality social work practice. This included having the ability to:
 - a) understand the impact on social worker time of carrying out new or amended policies and procedures
 - b) identify the resources necessary for quality social work practice and make transparent and defensible decisions about trade-offs in service delivery when the volume of work exceeded resources
 - c) adapt service provision or service quality in focused areas of work if volume pressures changed.
- 2.9 Other areas of focus during the course of the review included:
- the cross-agency factors that have an impact on the demand for social work services and the organisation's ability to manage this demand
 - different approaches required for appropriate Māori and Pacific models of practice
 - aspects of organisational culture and leadership which influence ways of working and enable quality social work practice.
- 2.10 An explicit examination of staff skills, knowledge, experience and professional confidence was out of the scope of this review. However, by default, the review gathered information related to staff capability, which affects workload issues and the quality of social work delivered. This information has informed several of the recommendations in this review.
- 2.11 The detailed areas of inquiry are attached as [Appendix 1](#). These set out the 21 questions this review sought to answer.
- 2.12 This review's findings and recommendations aim to provide a strong platform for further improvement in organisational performance and practice quality, to deliver real results for the most vulnerable children and young people.
- 2.13 The recommendations of this review build upon several years of improvement in key output areas, most notably reducing waiting times and waiting lists, and improving transactional processes and case management outputs. More recently the emphasis on transactional, process-focused systems has shifted. Child, Youth and Family's Strategic Plan 2012–2015 focuses on the quality of social work practice, using enhanced practice and knowledge systems to deliver it³.
- 2.14 Although this review was internally focused, Child, Youth and Family needs to view its work in the context of significant change in the wider landscape around vulnerable children. Government reforms under the Vulnerable Children Bill place accountability on a range of agencies to work far more closely to improve results for vulnerable

² CYRAS is Child, Youth and Family's primary case management system. It also forms Child, Youth and Family's primary source of data for information and reporting.

³ Mā mātou, mā tātou Strategic Plan 2012–2015, p 8.

children. Child, Youth and Family has a key part to play. Its ability to clearly define its role and to work more collaboratively with more partners at every point will be crucial. The recommendations in this review aim to reflect this.

3 Context and environment

- 3.1 Although this review was internally focused, the wider environment around vulnerable children, care and protection has a significant impact on Child, Youth and Family's current challenges; as does the organisation's own background. Key factors include:
- Significant change in the wider landscape around vulnerable children, internationally and nationally. New Zealand is undergoing major reform across government and the wider social sector, placing accountability on a range of agencies to work far more closely to make a greater difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people, and their families and whānau.
 - A large increase in the demand for Child, Youth and Family's services. Child, Youth and Family has dealt with a six-fold increase in its reported number of notifications over the past 15 years.
 - A significant improvement programme within Child, Youth and Family since 2006. The organisation has made considerable progress with the timeliness of its services, the implementation of social work processes and the delivery of key outputs. This review reflects a logical and necessary shift in emphasis towards quality practices and services focused where they are most needed.

Developments in the New Zealand child care and protection system, and international context

- 3.2 Care and protection systems in New Zealand and around the world have grown and improved since the 1980s in response to common issues and concerns.
- 3.3 The New Zealand system is not unique in its challenges: overworked staff, complex systems, services under pressure, increasingly complex child and family needs, high profile child abuse cases, rising notifications and a stream of reviews and restructuring. All these concerns are features of the jurisdictions New Zealand has most in common with – the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States.
- 3.4 New Zealand's care and protection services (and those of similar jurisdictions) have improved over the years. We have moved away from having little or no useable data (in the form of management information), limited staff training or education and informal relationships across agencies. We are driving the growing professionalism of social work, greater understanding around good practice and service quality, an on-demand reporting capability, highly developed assessment tools and more formalised interagency working. In addition, we are providing statutory social work services to more and more children and young people, and managing a greater complexity of needs.

Comparative social work models: How does the New Zealand model 'fit' internationally?

- 3.5 New Zealand inherited the Anglo-American child protection model of addressing child maltreatment common to English speaking countries⁴, which focuses on identifying and assessing risk to a child's safety and removing them from potentially harmful family situations. In contrast, continental Europe (particularly France) uses a family services model that focuses more strongly on maintaining children within the family and providing services such as parent education, therapy or community

⁴ Waldegrave, Charles (2006), pp 57–76

support. These models are grounded in the different legal systems in these countries: the Anglo-American legal system is adversarial and rights based, while the Franco-European inquisitorial system is more family focused and problem solving.⁵

- 3.6 In the late 1980s, *Pūao Te Ata Tū* and the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 (CYP&F Act) introduced indigenous Māori elements to the New Zealand system, which are more like the family preservation approach used in continental Europe than the traditional child rescue model. These elements included the principles of the CYP&F Act 1989 (which require that “wherever possible the relationship between a child or young person and his or her family, whānau, hapū, iwi, and family group should be maintained and strengthened”⁶). Processes such as family group conferences and family/whānau hui also reflect the family preservation approach.

Changes and developments, reviews and restructurings are part of on-going processes worldwide

- 3.7 Like child protection agencies in other jurisdictions, Child, Youth and Family (and its predecessor agencies) has been reviewed and restructured many times.⁷ Each review has offered new insights into how the child protection agency could work better. They have built up our knowledge base about what works, offered practical recommendations for new initiatives and, at times, secured additional funding to improve the service. These are discussed in more detail below.
- 3.8 This on-going process of review and refinement has also occurred in other jurisdictions. The United Kingdom has experienced a series of reports following child deaths, including the Laming Inquiry (2003) and the Munro Report (2011). Both of these were followed by legislative change. This is not a one-off fix, but an on-going process. The United Kingdom’s Department of Education in its response to the Munro Report stated it needed a system that recognised “that risk and uncertainty are features of the system, where risk can never be eliminated, but it can be managed smarter”.⁸

The Mason Report 1992

- 3.9 The CYP&F Act 1989 was implemented in the early 1990s during a period of particularly constrained public spending and increasing notifications. Subsequent reviews found both the level of resource to implement the new Act and the capability of the organisation to deliver it was inadequate at the time. The Mason Report in 1992 raised both these issues with a particular focus on staff competence and training. This resulted in significant work to up-skill staff, but brought no additional funding (as public sector spending was being cut across the board at the time). Despite the need for adequate resourcing being highlighted by Mason, Child, Youth and Family’s funding actually reduced during the early 1990s as numbers of notifications rose.

⁵ Waldegrave, Charles (2006), p 63

⁶ Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989

⁷ Examples include Mason, 1992; Weeks, 1994; Brown, 2000; Baseline Review 2003

⁸ UK Department for Education (2011)

The Brown Review (2000) and the Baseline Review (2003)

- 3.10 Several sources have stated the service was overburdened and underfunded during the 1990s.⁹ Public pressure and expectations had led to a tight focus on crisis intervention with little consideration of the underlying causes and patterns of abuse. The Brown and the Baseline reviews both raised this concern, noting that the department was “under extreme pressure”¹⁰ and that current expectations “create demands” on Child, Youth and Family “which are unrealistic”.¹¹
- 3.11 The Brown Review largely focused on social work practice, performance and monitoring. The Baseline Review focused on funding levels and demand management. Steps were taken after each review to address the issues. This on-going improvement has continued since 2003. This caseload review is a whole system review of current workload management, its challenges, drivers and impact on how Child, Youth and Family delivers quality care and protection.

Child, Youth and Family 2003–2013: improvements and challenges

- 3.12 Since the Brown and Baseline reviews, Child, Youth and Family has had several significant injections of new funding. Although starting from a very low base, there have been significant advances in services:
- Social worker training has been strengthened.
 - Up to 146 new social workers have been appointed.
 - Social worker registration was put in place to ensure a standard of competency was set and maintained for social work staff.
 - A backlog of up to 4,000 unallocated cases was cleared.
 - Additional funding was secured for care services (much of which was not discretionary) as this was taking financial resources from other parts of the business.¹²
 - Additional funding was secured for holding family group conferences and putting the resulting plans into action, so that more whānau members (and others) could be involved and a wider range of options were available to support children and their families’ needs.
 - Regional management was established along with analytical and administrative support to lift the quality of local services and to enable local decision making.
 - The Differential Response process was developed, with new tools to manage the demand via the intake process.
 - Within the Ministry of Social Development, the Family Support Services group was set up, later to become Family and Community Services; funding was established for services such as more social workers in schools and an expansion of Family Start to new sites.
 - There was a big investment in, and improvement of, Child, Youth and Family’s data management processes. This included:
 - expanding the functions of CYRAS

⁹ Garlick, Tim (2012), pp 155, 161, 176 and 177

¹⁰ Brown Review (2000), p 104

¹¹ Baseline Review (2003), p 99

¹² Baseline Review (2003), p 43

- o establishing a data warehouse (Te Pakoro) which provided management reporting information to site managers and to National Office to track performance and support policy-level decision making.

Developments in information technology and use and availability of data

- 3.13 IT systems and the availability of data have been a point of contention for years in New Zealand and in other child protection jurisdictions. Not only are many of these systems considered difficult and time-consuming for practitioners, they also fail to provide adequate management information to support good decision making. For example, the computer system was described as a “symbolic battlefield” in 1992.¹³ The United Kingdom’s Integrated Children’s System was described as “unwieldy” and “failing practitioners” because it absorbed social workers’ time and constrained their discretion.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the Baseline Review noted it could not access reliable data about the number of clients Child, Youth and Family was working with at any given time – for example, the number of children in care, the number of plans and orders in force, the number of children waiting for services.¹⁵
- 3.14 Over time, Child, Youth and Family (and its predecessors) augmented its IT systems through the expansion and enhancement of CYRAS and the establishment of the data warehouse (Te Pakoro). Te Pakoro was built with Baseline Review funding to enable supervisors, managers and National Office to track the progress of individual cases and staff workloads in real time and to provide a wide range of reports that could be accessed at site, or at National Office.
- 3.15 When CYRAS was rolled out in 2000 it was simply a case management tool for social workers. Its reporting capability mainly involved one-off manual reports completed in National Office. It did not include large parts of Child, Youth and Family’s activity (for example, residences, adoptions). CYRAS has been expanded and enhanced over time to include most parts of Child, Youth and Family’s business, including details of service providers and caregivers. It has also gained the capability to automatically process payments.
- 3.16 The latest enhancements to CYRAS include functionality for Tuituia¹⁶ reporting and Gateways. Tuituia allows social workers to develop reports with different views for different groups (for example, for families or the Court). The Gateways web tool allows district health board co-ordinators to view specified CYRAS information, and to add their information directly into a CYRAS file. The use of the web tool opens up possibilities for new, more flexible uses for CYRAS in the future.

Volumes have increased since 1998

- 3.17 At the same time as funding increased and tools and processes improved, there was a large increase in the reported number of notifications (from 23,652 in 1998 to 148,659¹⁷ in 2013). A wide range of factors was likely to have had an impact on this, including new approaches to reporting and recording family violence and an

¹³ Garlick, Tim (2012), p 154

¹⁴ All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work (2013), p 13

¹⁵ Baseline Review (2003), p 80

¹⁶ Child, Youth and Family’s assessment framework.

¹⁷ The 148,659 client notifications counts the total number of children Child, Youth and Family was notified about in the 2012/2013 financial year. It is made up of 57,766 police family violence (FV) referrals and 90,893 care and protection (C&P) notifications. A child is counted multiple times if they are in multiple notifications during the year.

increasing focus on emotional abuse and neglect. Therefore, Child, Youth and Family is assessing the risks and needs of more children and young people – and identifying a greater number of substantiated abuse findings – at the same time as it is screening many children who are found not to be at risk of harm or abuse.

- 3.18 New Zealand notification rates per 1,000 children aged 0–17 years are now markedly higher than they are in Australia (63 per 1,000 here, compared to 35 per 1,000 in Australia).
- 3.19 The total number of substantiated abuse findings has also increased (from 6,647 abuse findings in 1998 to 22,984 in 2013¹⁸) although the overall proportion of notifications resulting in a substantiated finding has reduced (from 28 per cent in 1998 to 15.5 per cent in 2013). Of the total number of notifications to Child, Youth and Family in 2013, there were approximately 5,000 family whānau agreements and 8,600 family group conferences for individual children and young people.
- 3.20 Thus, the gateway into Child, Youth and Family has widened, but large numbers of children who are notified to Child, Youth and Family do not go on to require Child, Youth and Family intervention. This is discussed later in the report, which notes that such cases usually contain sufficient concerns of child wellbeing to warrant an assessment. However, it does raise questions around the potential need for more alternative service pathways (for assessment and intervention) and interagency action across the broader social services sector.

Role of Child, Youth and Family in a continuum of social services and across agencies

- 3.21 Child, Youth and Family is the government agency that has the legal power to intervene to protect and help children who are at risk of being harmed, ill-treated or abused or who have serious problem behaviour where there is a risk of harm to themselves or others. The Baseline Review found that maintaining its core focus was dependent on Child, Youth and Family being part of a strong continuum of social services.¹⁹ It noted that services to support families are essential if Child, Youth and Family is to focus more closely on safety and security issues for children and young people.²⁰ This issue has been raised in several past reviews. Various attempts have been made to address it, but the issue has not yet been resolved.
- 3.22 The relationship between Child, Youth and Family's core social work/child protection function and the community services/funding function is an area of on-going focus.²¹ A range of structural arrangements has been tried over the years – for example, the New Zealand Community Funding Agency (NZCFA) as a separate business unit; Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) combined into Child, Youth and Family; the establishment of Family and Community Services. The lack of a satisfactory solution may have led Child, Youth and Family to continue to work with children who may be better served outside the statutory system.
- 3.23 Two significant current initiatives are intended to address this issue: Children's Teams and Investing in Services for Outcomes (ISO).

¹⁸ The total number of substantiated findings of physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect identified in Child and Family's assessments and investigations during the financial year – individual 'finding types' are each counted separately and children and young people may be included more than once where they have multiple substantiated findings.

¹⁹ Baseline Review (2003), p 23

²⁰ Baseline Review (2003), p 27

²¹ Garlick, Tim (2012), pp 155, 181 and 186

- The Children's Teams are part of wider work under the Children's Action Plan to establish comprehensive, interagency early intervention to divert potential clients away from Child, Youth and Family's statutory services.
- ISO aims to ensure provider services purchased by Family and Community Services and Child, Youth and Family are the most effective and proven types of services to support Child, Youth and Family's statutory services.

Services managed by Child, Youth and Family

- 3.24 Child, Youth and Family works with New Zealand's most vulnerable children and young people, as well as their families and communities, to help them be safe, strong and thrive. It is the government agency that has the legal power to intervene to protect and help children who are at risk of harm, ill-treatment or abuse or who have serious problem behaviour.
- 3.25 Child, Youth and Family works with the Police and the Courts in dealing with young offenders under the youth justice system. It provides residential and care services for children in need of care and protection and for young offenders.
- 3.26 As part of the Ministry of Social Development, Child, Youth and Family also has a role in funding community organisations working with children, young people and their families to support the community's role in protecting and helping children.

Care and protection services

- 3.27 The services provided by Child, Youth and Family in care and protection are summarised below.

Intake services

- Child, Youth and Family is responsible for the **initial screening** of concerns about children and young people's wellbeing through Family Violence Interagency Response Service (FVIARS) meetings and referrals to Child, Youth and Family's National Contact Centre and sites. Referrals or reports of concern can be made to Child, Youth and Family by any person who believes that any child or young person has been or is likely to be harmed (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill-treated, abused, neglected or deprived²².

Assessment services

- Following the initial screening of referrals or reports of concern, Child, Youth and Family carries out **child and family assessments and investigations**. These begin through engagement with children and their families within specific timeframes, depending on the level of concerns and risks (24 hours, 48 hours, 7 days or 28 days). Child and family assessments help Child, Youth and Family understand the needs of the children and the family and pull together wider whānau and community support. Investigations into cases of suspected serious abuse or neglect are undertaken alongside the New Zealand Police, under a joint Child Protection Protocol.²³

²² Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, section 15

²³ <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/documents/working-with-others/final-child-protection-protocol.pdf>

Intervention services

- **Partnered response pathway** is a way of providing an early, comprehensive and co-ordinated response to families or whānau with low level issues.²⁴ This response is used when family/whānau circumstances may be having an impact on the child or young person, but do not present danger or harm. In these cases, there may be a need for help to initiate or strengthen the service provision for families.²⁵ Under the partnered response pathway, social workers do not provide a direct intervention to children and their families, but connect them to other services.
- **Family whānau agreements** adhere to the principle of working at the minimum necessary level of intervention, while supporting families who may be experiencing difficulties in caring for their children.²⁶ Family whānau agreements are not intended for cases where a social worker believes a child or young person needs care or protection. They are described as support when a family is worried about or having difficulties with caring for their child, and might need help to get back on the right path.²⁷
- **Family group conferences** are intended to be used in cases where a social worker has formed a belief that a child or young person is in need of care or protection under section 14 of the CYP&F Act 1989. This intervention is described as a way Child, Youth and Family supports family/whānau to develop their own solutions to the issues they face. Families/whānau and professionals work together to agree how they can keep the child or young person safe within their community.²⁸ Family group conferences may or may not include Family Court orders.
- **Care services** for when children and young people are unable to remain safely at home.
- **Other care and protection services** including the provision of reports to the Family Court under the Care of Children Act 2004.

²⁴ <http://www.practicecentre.cyf.govt.nz/service-pathways/care-and-protection/care-and-protection-service-pathway-guidelines.html#Partneredresponse7>

²⁵ <http://www.practicecentre.cyf.govt.nz/policy/assessment-and-decision-making/resources/decision-response-guidelines.html>

²⁶ <http://www.practicecentre.cyf.govt.nz/service-pathways/care-and-protection/care-and-protection-service-pathway-guidelines.html#Familywhānauagreement8>

²⁷ <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/keeping-kids-safe/ways-we-work-with-families/family-whanau-agreements.html>

²⁸ <http://www.practicecentre.cyf.govt.nz/service-pathways/care-and-protection/care-and-protection-service-pathway-guidelines.html#Familygroupconference9>

Youth justice services

3.28 The services provided by Child, Youth and Family in youth justice are summarised below.

- A youth justice **family group conference** is a meeting where a young person who has offended, their family, victims and other people like the police, a social worker or youth advocate, discuss how to help the young person to:
 - own up to what they did wrong and learn from their mistakes
 - find practical ways the young person can put things right and make up for what they did
 - look at why they offended and find ways to help them turn their life around, which may include programmes that help with life skills, employment or education, or activities like team sports and mentoring.
- Child, Youth and Family also works with the most serious youth offenders subject to **Youth Court orders**, including orders for:
 - supervision with residence
 - supervision with activity
 - supervision.

Residential services

3.29 The residential services provided by Child, Youth and Family in care and protection and youth justice are summarised below.

- **Residential care placements** are used when the behaviour of a child or young person puts themselves or others at risk; when there is no suitable community placement available to take care of the child or young person's needs; or when a young person has been arrested by police, remanded in Court, sentenced to imprisonment, or the Court has ordered them to go into a residence.

Child, Youth and Family operates:

- four **care and protection** residences
- four **youth justice** residences.

Adoption services

3.30 Child, Youth and Family provides services to families involved in the adoption process. It also works with adults who need help to connect with their birth parents or families.

Volumes of work managed by Child, Youth and Family

Care and protection volumes

- 3.31 The following section provides an overview of the work volumes for care and protection services. [Figure 1](#) provides an overview of the volumes of work at each stage of the social work process.
- 3.32 In the 2012/2013 financial year, Child, Youth and Family reported 148,659 client notifications into the service. This figure is comprised of 57,766 police family violence referrals and 90,893 care and protection client notifications. A child is counted multiple times within these figures if they are in multiple notifications during the year, and one telephone call into the National Contact Centre may result in multiple notifications if the call relates to more than one child or young person (each child or young person notified is separately counted).

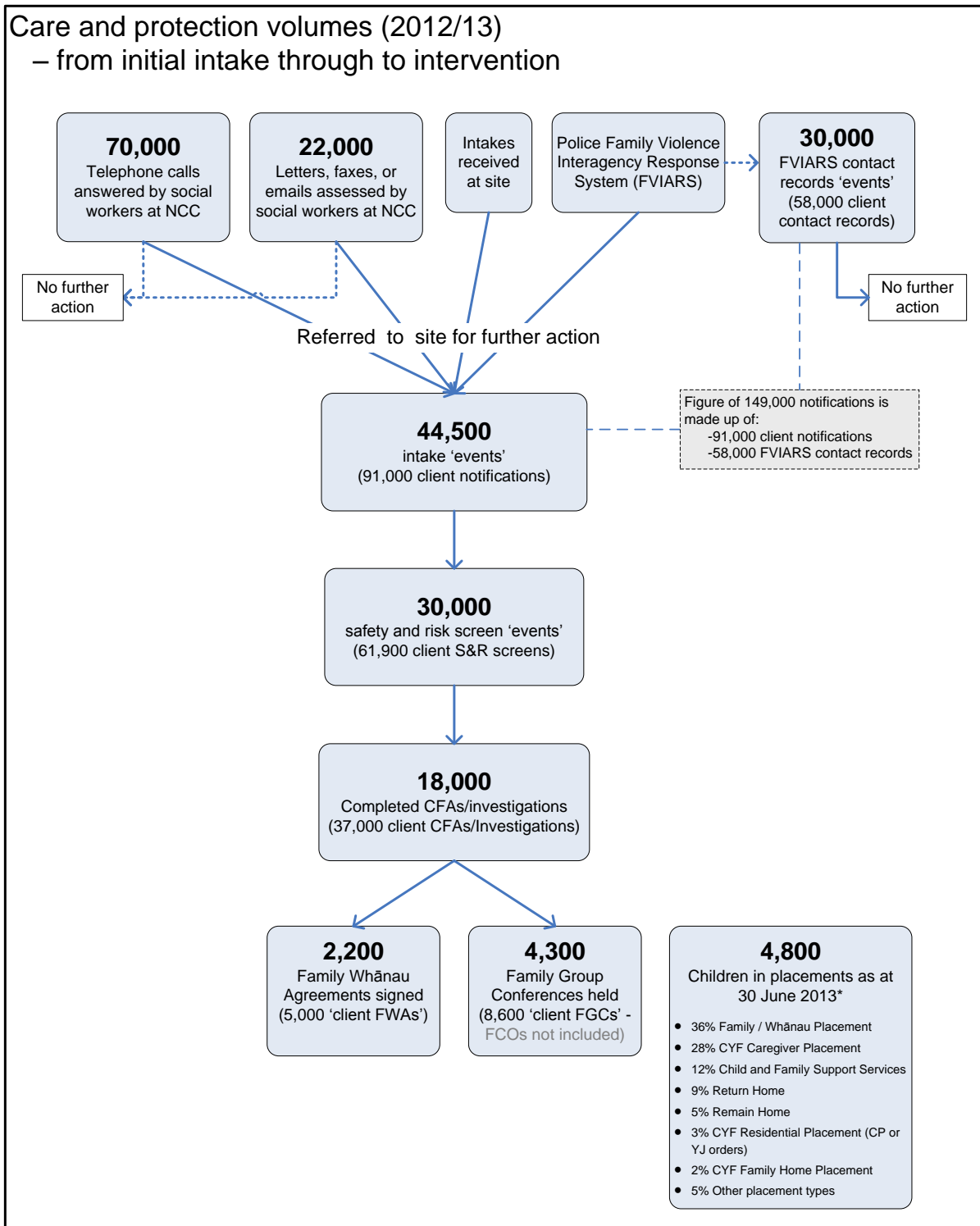
Police family violence referrals

- The 57,766 police family violence referrals were logged by the National Contact Centre but did not require any further action by a site. If events (instead of children) are counted, this equates to around 30,000 police family violence referrals.

Intakes requiring further consideration by site

- There were 90,893 care and protection client notifications passed to a Child, Youth and Family site for further consideration. If events (instead of children) are counted, this equates to around 44,500 intakes being passed to a Child, Youth and Family site for consideration in the 2012/2013 financial year.

Figure 1: High level overview of key care and protection volumes, 2012/2013



* The figures quoted for children in placements as at 30 June 2013 include both care and protection and youth justice placements.

When quoting figures, two numbers have generally been used. The number of actual 'events' or 'cases' (large text) and the number of children in all of those events - the 'client count'. The client count counts a child multiple times if they are in multiple events.

3.33 As shown in [Figure 1](#), in the 2012/2013 financial year:

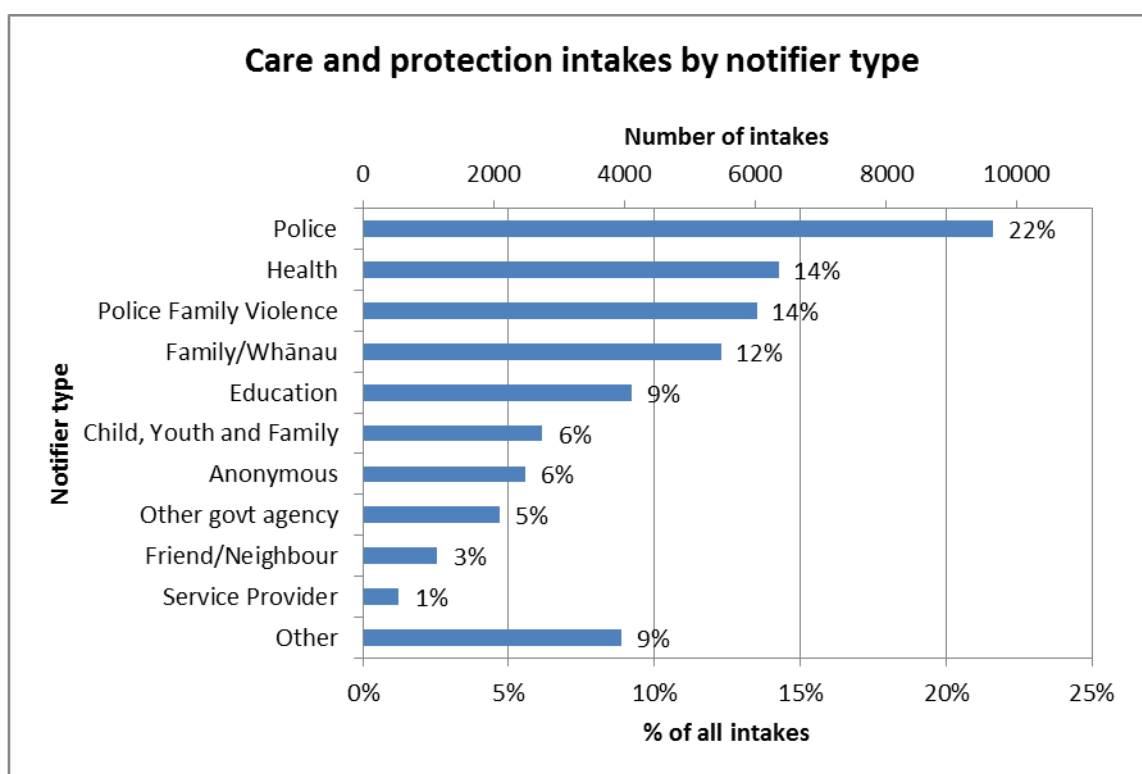
- Just over 70,000 calls were answered by social workers at the National Contact Centre. These came from around 650,000 calls made to the Child, Youth and Family free-phone number in total.
- Just over 22,000 letters, faxes or emails were assessed by social workers at the National Contact Centre.
- This work, combined with a small number of other referrals made directly to sites and police family violence referrals that required further action from a site, resulted in around 44,500 notifications passed to Child, Youth and Family sites for consideration and further information gathering. These notifications involved approximately 65,000 individual children or young people.²⁹

3.34 [Figure 2](#) below provides a summary of the primary sources of notifications to Child, Youth and Family in the 2012/2013 year (excluding family violence contact records from New Zealand Police unless these required further action by Child, Youth and Family). In total, approximately 64 per cent of Child, Youth and Family's intakes were referred by a partner agency³⁰, with the New Zealand Police the most common notifier into Child, Youth and Family.

²⁹ Note that this is when each child or young person is counted only once. Including cases where multiple referrals were made and each child was counted multiple times increases this figure to approximately 90,800.

³⁰ 'Partner agency' includes New Zealand Police, the Ministries of Health and Education and other government agencies.

Figure 2: Care and protection intakes by notifier type, 2012/2013



Note: this graph uses notification 'events' - *not* client notifications where each client in a notification is counted. The number of notifications totals to approximately 44,500 (see Figure 1).

3.35 In addition to its initial intake screening work, in 2012/2013 Child, Youth and Family social workers completed approximately:

- 30,000 safety assessments³¹ for around 48,500 individual children or young people
- 18,000 full child and family assessments or investigations for around 31,000 individual children or young people
- 2,200 family whānau agreements for approximately 4,400 individual children or young people
- 4,300 family group conferences (held, reconvened or reviewed) for around 6,600 individual children or young people, including for children or young people where a family whānau agreement had also been signed, and vice versa.

Number of open cases being worked at a given time

3.36 As at 8 February 2014, Child, Youth and Family held approximately **11,000** open and allocated care and protection cases of which:

- 29 per cent had an open child and family assessment/investigation phase
- 69 per cent had an open intervention phase

³¹ A 'safety assessment' occurs at the beginning of a full child and family assessment or investigation. At the end of an initial safety assessment, social workers determine whether or not an in-depth 'full' child and family assessment or investigation is required. Since this review was done, the term 'safety assessment' has been replaced with 'safety and risk screen'.

- 26 per cent had an open placement phase
- 1 per cent had an open partnered response phase
- 5 per cent had an open carer phase.³²

3.37 Child, Youth and Family is currently funded to employ 753 frontline social workers to undertake its care and protection work.

Youth justice volumes

3.38 The following section provides an overview of the volumes of work managed by Child, Youth and Family at each stage of the social work process for youth justice services.

Youth justice family group conference referrals

- In 2012/2013 there were 6,893 youth justice family group conference referrals made to Child, Youth and Family.
- This included 3,019 Intention to Charge family group conference referrals from the New Zealand Police, 3,505 Court Directed family group conference referrals, and a small number of referrals for child offenders (those aged 12 or 13 years).

Youth justice family group conferences held

- In 2012/2013 there were 6,259 youth justice family group conferences held.

Youth Court orders

- In 2012/2013 a total of 527 of the most serious Youth Court orders were made, including Supervision with Residence, Supervision with Activity, and Supervision orders.

Number of open cases being worked on at a given time

3.39 As at 8 February 2014, Child, Youth and Family had **1,600** open and allocated youth justice cases of which:

- 99 per cent had an open intervention phase
- 17 per cent had an open placement phase
- 1 per cent had an open investigation phase.

3.40 Child, Youth and Family is currently funded to employ 182 frontline social workers to undertake its youth justice work.

³² Note that the total percentage adds to over 100 per cent as there may be multiple phases open in a single case at any given time.

4 Background to this review

- 4.1 The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development commissioned this review following concerns about factors impeding quality social work and the effect this was having on vulnerable children and young people. Frontline social work staff, the PSA and some external agencies were raising concerns about the large volumes of cases and workloads. Monitoring reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner were also highlighting high workloads and caseloads and the impact of this on the quality of practice and outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.2 In particular, in March 2013 the Office of the Chief Social Worker carried out a review of a serious case for the Minister for Social Development, the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development and the Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family. The case concerned a family of four children who were exposed to neglect and abuse despite notifications to Child, Youth and Family. The case review took a systems approach and evaluated the environment in which social workers were operating.
- 4.3 The first recommendation of that case review was that the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development (who is also the Chairperson of the Vulnerable Children's Board) ensures strong interagency relationships and co-operation to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people. The second recommendation was:
- That the Office of the Chief Social Worker lead a quantitative and qualitative in-depth analysis of social work practice to enable better understanding of:*
- a) *Current caseloads and workloads of social workers to evaluate both volume and complexity of cases that social workers are managing*
 - b) *The consistency of the application of child protection thresholds in case allocation, case management and case closure*
 - c) *The quality of social work assessments*
 - d) *The total use of social work practitioner's time and daily activities*
 - e) *Social workers' use of and experience of supervision.*
- 4.4 Child, Youth and Family had previously considered a range of workload management issues over a number of years. Plans were put in place to address the challenges identified at those times; however, they have not resulted in sustained change in the right areas. This review took a far more in-depth analysis than was taken in the past, although many of the issues identified echo those of earlier reviews.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 The scope and depth of this review needed a multi-systemic, holistic approach to understand social worker caseloads, casework and workloads in Child, Youth and Family.
- 5.2 The review combined different methodologies and data sources to provide a comprehensive and integrated picture of the organisation's position. By triangulating its sources of evidence, the review provided diverse ways of looking at the same issue to strengthen the credibility of its conclusions.
- 5.3 A wide range of stakeholders were engaged to support the reliability and validity of the findings, and to build a shared understanding and ownership of the conclusions and plans for improvement and change. The analysis in this report reflects the triangulation of this evidence.
- 5.4 [Figure 3](#) summarises the key methodologies and approaches to data and information gathering undertaken by the review.

Figure 3: Overview of review methodology

<i>Initial scoping and consultation</i>	With key stakeholders on the focus, scope, content and methodology of the review; including key outputs, reporting mechanisms and timescales for delivery.
<i>Literature review</i>	Of current published research, evaluations and reports of social work workload, casework and social work systems.
<i>Policy and legislative analysis</i>	Of current policy, procedure and legislation and how this was shaping priorities and practice behaviours.
<i>Review of organisational performance data</i>	Tracking changes, trends, patterns and performance management results over time.
<i>Extensive and in-depth frontline staff interviews and consultation</i>	Over the course of the review: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approximately 590 frontline staff members were interviewed • approximately 850 interviews were conducted (a number of staff members were interviewed multiple times).
<i>In-depth interviews with middle and senior managers</i>	A total of 36 managers were interviewed. Senior managers took part in five workshops to evaluate the data, draw out key findings and shape recommendations.
<i>Online staff survey</i>	Three wide-reaching online staff surveys tailored for case holders, managers and support staff. A total of 892 staff members responded.

<i>Case file analysis</i>	<p>In-depth analysis of recorded casework and case file evidence on social work practice.</p> <p>A total of 841 cases were analysed across the review.</p>
<i>Extensive activity study</i>	<p>Wide-reaching activity study charting and measuring social work time spent on key social work tasks and the contribution of other roles to the tasks of social workers.</p> <p>A total of 660 staff members from 30 sites across the country participated.</p>
<i>Feedback from children and families</i>	<p>Reviewing and collating feedback from families in New Zealand about the nature and impact on them of Child, Youth and Family's work.</p>
<i>Information gathering from interagency partners</i>	<p>Interviews with 15 Care and Protection Resource Panels, a number of non-government organisations and one Children's Team as representatives of local interagency networks to discuss the role of Child, Youth and Family.</p>
<i>Interagency consultation workshop</i>	<p>A range of agencies who work closely with Child, Youth and Family participated in evaluating the data found in the review and drawing out key findings and conclusions.</p>
<i>External Expert Advisory Panel</i>	<p>A diverse panel of social work experts who are external to Child, Youth and Family provided critical oversight to the review. These included a mix of operational managers and academics from both New Zealand and overseas.</p>
<i>Validation meetings</i>	<p>With groups of frontline social work teams to test the findings and outcomes of the review for validity.</p>
<i>Final report and recommendations</i>	<p>Reporting on findings and recommendations to key stakeholders with an emphasis on implementing changes put forward in this report.</p>

5.5 A detailed description of the review methodology is attached as [Appendix 2](#).

6 Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection

Key findings

1. The review found that overall there was a clearer understanding of Child, Youth and Family's role in youth justice than in care and protection work.
2. Operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and role in undertaking its care and protection responsibilities were being described, interpreted and applied broadly. This had several consequences:
 - a) Partner agencies did not always have a consistent understanding of Child, Youth and Family's core mandate and role. Many referring agencies said their understanding came from local knowledge and experience, and they believed Child, Youth and Family had a role in lower risk situations because there was no alternative support in their community.
 - b) Child, Youth and Family was receiving and assessing referrals that either didn't warrant statutory intervention or required a response outside or in addition to that provided by Child, Youth and Family (for example, support with parenting, parental mental health or parental use of alcohol or drugs).
3. In addition, the review found the operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's role in the guidelines on which social workers based their decisions were too open to broad interpretation. As a result, a greater-than-necessary number of cases received further action by Child, Youth and Family.
4. Clearer operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's role would allow social workers to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable, and would clarify the role of other agencies and partners in supporting children, young people and their families.

Recommendation 1

- a) In the short term, more accurately define and articulate Child, Youth and Family's operational mandate and core business in care and protection to:
 - reflect and target its focus on assessing and protecting the most high need and the most vulnerable children and young people
 - provide greater clarity and guidelines for social workers and referring agencies as to which children and young people may require a statutory child protection response, and which would be better supported by a non-statutory response.
- b) Work with government and non-government partners to develop clear and commonly understood definitions of needs, risks and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people to:
 - provide clarity for both Child, Youth and Family social workers and partner agencies, enhancing the ability to work collaboratively and provide a range of services around children with multiple and varying levels of need
 - support and assist the strategic direction of the Vulnerable Children's Board in the development of both improved capacity and capability to work effectively with vulnerable children and their families across all sectors – both government and non-government
 - re-negotiate contracts with non-government providers to offer more services and support for children who are currently directed to Child, Youth and Family.

Defining core business

- 6.1 Child, Youth and Family is the government agency that has the legal power to intervene to protect and help children who are at risk of being harmed, ill-treated or abused or who have serious problem behaviour where there is a risk of harm to themselves or others. Child, Youth and Family works with the Police and the Courts in dealing with young offenders under the youth justice system. It provides residential and care services for children in need of care and protection and for young offenders. As part of the Ministry of Social Development, Child, Youth and Family also has a role in funding community organisations working with children, young people and their families to support the community's role in protecting and helping children.
- 6.2 A clearly defined and commonly understood definition of an organisation's core business is key to evaluating and understanding demand, resource, workload and capacity issues.
- 6.3 The impact of defining Child, Youth and Family's core business on vulnerable children and young people is significant. It means determining which children and young people have risks and needs that require a statutory child protection agency, and which have needs that would be better met by a non-statutory response.
- 6.4 Clarity helps prevent children and their families becoming unnecessarily involved in a statutory service. Research highlights the negative impact on families involved in statutory child protection investigations which are not justified.
- "It is hard to exaggerate the extent of rage, humiliation and intense fear felt by many parents who are subjected to child protection investigations when the concerns are not substantiated."³³*
- 6.5 The public's and partner agencies' perceptions of Child, Youth and Family's role directly influence the demand for social work services, through patterns and volumes of referrals into the agency.
- 6.6 Child, Youth and Family holds statutory care and protection and youth justice roles. It must target its resources to children and young people most at risk of abuse, serious harm or committing criminal offences. It must balance the rights of children to be safe, cared for and heard; the responsibilities of parents and wider families, whānau, hapū and iwi to care for and protect children; and the role of the state to intervene only when needed.
- 6.7 Given the finite resources available to achieve this complex task, the significance of ensuring Child, Youth and Family focuses its effort on the most vulnerable children and young people cannot be overstated.
- 6.8 The review found youth justice services had relatively definitive boundaries of entry and exit. Put simply: had a crime been committed by a child or young person? Was there an intention to charge that child or young person with an offence? Had the family group conference plan or Youth Court sentence been completed? These boundaries, while still having some flexibility, enabled a relatively clear and transparent definition of Child, Youth and Family's core business in youth justice work.

³³ Scott, D (2006)

- 6.9 In comparison to youth justice, the boundaries for Child, Youth and Family's involvement in the life of a child or young person were more complex from a care and protection perspective.
- 6.10 This chapter analyses the legislative and operational provisions that attempt to set the boundaries and define Child, Youth and Family's role in relation to care and protection work.

Legislative provisions for care and protection work

- 6.11 The provisions set out in section 14(1)(a)–(c) of the CYP&F Act 1989 provide some clarity around the situations that require a Child, Youth and Family response. The provisions state that a child or young person may be in need of care, protection or services in the following situations:
- a) *The child or young person is being, or is likely to be, harmed (whether physically or emotionally or sexually), ill-treated, abused or seriously deprived.*
 - b) *The child's or young person's development or physical or mental or emotional well-being is being, or is likely to be, impaired or neglected, and that impairment or neglect is, or is likely to be, serious and avoidable.*
 - c) *Serious differences exist between the child or young person and the parents or guardians or other persons having the care of the child or young person to such an extent that the physical or mental or emotional well-being of the child or young person is being seriously impaired.*
- 6.12 Section 14(1)(d)–(i) of the Act describes particular situations for intervention. These include circumstances relating to the child or young person's behaviour or offending; parents unwilling or unable to care; child abandonment; parenting difficulties causing serious impairment to the child; and the child's ability (or inability) to form a significant psychological attachment to a parent or caregiver.
- 6.13 While the legislation describes terms such as 'likelihood' and 'seriousness' of harm and impairment, these terms are subjective and open to interpretation and judgment. The role of Child, Youth and Family's policy and procedure is to interpret and define such terms in practice. This is necessary to support clear and consistent social work decisions about the circumstances for children and young people that require statutory involvement.

Tools and resources to help decision making

- 6.14 Social workers and supervisors have many resources to support their decisions about when and with whom they should work. These include:
- legislation
 - a Decision Response Tool, designed to help social workers and supervisors decide whether an assessment of a reported concern is needed, and in what timeframe
 - the Child Protection Protocol, a joint agreement with the New Zealand Police for investigating suspected cases of serious abuse or neglect
 - decision response policies, guidelines, and a care and protection practice framework which outlines Child, Youth and Family's approach to care and protection work

- the assessment framework, Tuituia, to help social workers undertake quality assessments of the risks, strengths and needs of children, young people and their family/whānau
- external publications and communications material about Child, Youth and Family, including the public website.

6.15 The review found these sources were open for interpretation when determining whether or not the needs of a child or young person met the threshold for Child, Youth and Family assessment and intervention.

Interpreting the legislation

6.16 The Decision Response Tool was the primary tool used by staff at both the National Contact Centre and sites to help decide whether a social worker needed to engage with a family and begin an assessment or investigation.

6.17 Staff reported, and the reviewers observed, the Decision Response Tool was primarily incident focused and targeted at immediate situations of risk and harm for children and young people. The Child Protection Protocol also provided clear guidance about what constituted the most serious cases of maltreatment, which supported effective decision making about Child, Youth and Family's role in these cases.

6.18 In policy and procedure, descriptions of Child, Youth and Family's role in care and protection work often used words such as 'most at risk', 'abused and neglected', 'statutory' and 'involuntary'. These words painted a picture of an organisation that worked with a specific group: children and young people for whom there was no alternative support and who were in situations of potentially severe and unavoidable harm.

6.19 Consequently, the review found Child, Youth and Family's role was clear in situations involving serious maltreatment of children and young people such as physical abuse, non-accidental injury or sexual abuse.

6.20 However, these situations made up only a small proportion of the total number of cases being notified to Child, Youth and Family. Only 15 per cent of cases reviewed at initial intake concerned the physical safety of the child or young person. Only 7 per cent involved concern around possible sexual harm. Of the total number of substantiated findings of abuse and neglect in 2012/2013, approximately 80 per cent related to neglect or emotional abuse rather than to physical or sexual abuse.³⁴

6.21 The prevalent concerns being notified to Child, Youth and Family related to factors that had an impact on parenting ability, such as parental use of alcohol or drugs, their mental health or family violence in the home. These factors often translated into situations of chronic neglect or emotional abuse. Such cases require a well-planned and co-ordinated response across a range of agencies working with the family. However, they do not necessarily require the same degree of urgent statutory social work response to secure the immediate safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.

6.22 The review also found that situations of chronic family violence, on-going parenting difficulties and neglect often did not present an obvious single 'incident' of harm. This

³⁴ <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/about-us/who-we-are-what-we-do/notifications-requiring-further-action-back-up.html#Totalsubstantiatedabusefindingsbyabusetype3>

made it difficult for staff to determine an appropriate response using Child, Youth and Family's current response guidelines.

- 6.23 Using Child, Youth and Family's current response guidelines, staff also reported ambiguity about the role of Child, Youth and Family in relation to:
- behaviour related concerns, particularly in relation to adolescents
 - sexualised behaviour between children
 - adolescent sexual relationships
 - recording and assessing new reports of concern about cases that were already open and being worked on by Child, Youth and Family.
- 6.24 The legislative definition of children in need of care or protection was also open to some interpretation. The term 'likely to be' when describing children at risk of harm, abuse or impairment required a subjective judgment about how probable harm needed to be before a child needed care or protection.
- 6.25 Child, Youth and Family's website provided a succinct summary of the organisation's work. However, this definition did not fully differentiate between the role of Child, Youth and Family and the types of services or responses provided by other social services or government agencies. Nor did it clearly describe the circumstances in which children or young people might require a Child, Youth and Family response. For example, the website stated:
- We work closely with families to help them find their own solutions, so they can:*
- *deal with their problems*
 - *make the changes they need so their children will be safe and well cared for*
 - *achieve their goals for the family.*³⁵
- 6.26 When examining the Decision Response Tool, the review found that similar descriptions applied to 28-day response cases and those which warranted a partnered response with another service provider. The similarity made it difficult to determine whether a child or young person's situation would be best supported by Child, Youth and Family or by a partner agency.
- 6.27 The review concluded that, overall, operational definitions available to staff and stakeholders about when and how Child, Youth and Family should become involved with a child or young person were being described, interpreted and applied broadly.
- 6.28 As a result, it was unclear to government and non-government agencies, as well as to the public, which children or young people should be supported by Child, Youth and Family. This led to cases being referred for a social work assessment that didn't warrant a statutory intervention or required a response outside that provided by Child, Youth and Family. Patterns of referrals into Child, Youth and Family suggested a belief in many referring agencies that all needs of vulnerable children require referral to the statutory child protection agency. Around 64 per cent of Child, Youth and Family intakes were referred by its partner agencies.
- 6.29 Interviews with partner agencies also found it was difficult to establish a clear consensus about the role of Child, Youth and Family. Many respondents reported their understanding of Child, Youth and Family's role came from their own experience and local knowledge. Many reported a view that Child, Youth and Family had a role

³⁵ <http://www.cyf.govt.nz/about-us/who-we-are-what-we-do/index.html>

in lower risk situations, often because they saw no alternative support in the community. The possibility of lower risk situations escalating also contributed to a sense Child, Youth and Family should be involved.

- 6.30 The review team also observed the impact of broad operational definitions on decision making when they reviewed decisions made by social workers in individual cases. Even when the review team determined a case did not warrant further involvement by Child, Youth and Family, most cases could have been interpreted differently using the current information about the organisation's mandate and role.
- 6.31 The review found this lack of clarity resulted in a greater-than-necessary number of cases receiving further action by Child, Youth and Family. For example, when reviewers evaluated notifications into the contact centre using a more detailed operational description of Child, Youth and Family's role than that currently available to staff, they found that 15 per cent fewer cases could have progressed through to a Child, Youth and Family site for further consideration. Likewise, reviewers were more likely to agree a case should have passed through to a site for further consideration using the current decision response guidelines than when they used a clarified description.
- 6.32 Just over half of the staff members who gave feedback on what would help their decision making about new notifications into Child, Youth and Family highlighted the need for improved operational guidance.

International experience

- 6.33 New Zealand is not unique in its challenges around defining and clarifying when and with whom to engage with in care and protection social work. Many jurisdictions used similar terminology in legislation to outline the high level accountabilities for their child protection agencies. However, the mechanisms for translating the legislation into practice decisions differed greatly; various tools, guidelines and policies had developed that were unique to the interagency and structural context of each jurisdiction.
- 6.34 An interesting example was in New South Wales, which recently amended its legislation, changing 'harm' to 'serious harm'. The change had required a re-development of its child protection agency's entire process for assessing concerns.
- 6.35 In practice, it was unclear whether different jurisdictions were actually working with notably different levels of risks, needs and concerns for children. It was exceedingly difficult to compare needs and risks given the complex and unique situations of each jurisdiction.

Services provided by Child, Youth and Family

- 6.36 The review found a greater degree of clarity about what kind of services Child, Youth and Family provided in a care and protection context, than about when or to whom to provide these services. The services provided by Child, Youth and Family in care and protection are summarised in Chapter 3 of this report.

Provision of informal social work services

- 6.37 Ministry of Social Development publications also provided high level summaries of the services provided by Child, Youth and Family – *“social worker services, both statutory*

and informal". While a specific definition of informal services was not provided, these were understood to relate to the provision of family whānau agreements. These are not provided for under the CYP&F Act 1989 and do not require a social worker to have formed a belief a child is in need of care or protection. In practice, the extent to which such services are informal is questionable; all involvement by Child, Youth and Family is significant for children, young people and their families, and is unlikely to be experienced as informal by the family receiving it.

- 6.38 Child, Youth and Family's provision of family whānau agreements aligns with the theory of least intervention. However, the review found it may have had a direct impact on social workers' decisions on whether a case met the threshold for Child, Youth and Family involvement. The threshold for family whānau agreements did not require a belief a child was in need of care or protection. It was therefore possible social workers were assessing for a lower level of risk and need than that described in the CYP&F Act 1989.

7 Decision making about Child, Youth and Family's work in care and protection

Key findings

1. The majority of decisions social workers made at key points, based on what was known about the children or young people at the time, aligned with the current broad operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and role.
2. However, when a more focused definition was applied, 15 per cent fewer cases at the initial intake stage could have progressed through to a Child, Youth and Family site for further consideration. The impact was less significant at other key decision points.
3. Clarified guidelines would support better decision making. However, clarified guidance alone would not have a significant impact on the overall volume of cases being managed by Child, Youth and Family.
4. Although many cases assessed did not lead to a Child, Youth and Family intervention, these cases generally contained sufficient concerns about child wellbeing to warrant the assessment and did not represent 'wasted effort'.
5. Better referral information, including conversations with referrers in all cases, would improve decision making at intake.
6. More information gathering and stronger involvement with other agencies who knew children and young people would improve decision making at all key decision points.
7. The initial intake process through the National Contact Centre made it hard for social workers to gather additional local information about children and young people to support effective initial decision making at the earliest possible opportunity. In the current intake process, with the benefit of local knowledge and further information, many decisions were being changed once they reached the sites.
8. Current response timeframes and key performance indicators drive the way social workers prioritise their work and this affects the amount of time given to quality information gathering to support sound decisions (this is addressed in Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 2

In line with the definition of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and core business in care and protection (Recommendation 1), strengthen social workers' decision-making capacity and ability at intake, initial and full assessments, intervention, review and case closure:

- a) Re-visit the current intake structure, design and practices. Build stronger expectations and guidelines for pro-active information gathering at all key decision points, including direct engagement with children and young people, whānau and caregivers, as well as with health, education and other relevant agencies.

- 7.1 Social workers make complex and difficult decisions every day in uncertain, stressful, often hostile and unstable situations. They have to understand and take into account the unique situation of every family they work with. They need to judge risk to children from factors correlated or associated with child maltreatment, yet are not able to predict it³⁶. Social workers have to understand the unique situations of each family, their historical experiences, strengths, needs, risks and how the relationship between the child or young person, parents, wider family, different agencies and their environment interact.
- 7.2 In the wider context, many inter-connected factors influence these decisions. They include the following:³⁷
- Public perceptions about:
 - child abuse
 - the role and effectiveness of Child, Youth and Family
 - the willingness and confidence of the public to contact Child, Youth and Family for advice or to report a concern.
 - The situation for the individual family, including:
 - previous concerns about child wellbeing
 - previous involvement with Child, Youth and Family or other services
 - how recent, severe and specific are the concerns being reported
 - the role of the adults caring for children in causing and/or addressing the concerns.
 - Social workers' own experiences, confidence, skills and social work philosophy, including how often or how recently they have worked with similar cases and the outcomes of those cases.
 - The level of training, support, guidance and supervision available to help social workers navigate the complexities and challenges of high risk decision making.
 - Child, Youth and Family's organisational messages and drivers about its role and responsibilities.
 - The clarity and quality of guidance available to staff about when and how Child, Youth and Family should become involved.
 - The role of other services and agencies in working with children and young people, the availability of those services, and the mutual understanding of the contribution each agency makes.
 - Social expectations that harm to children can be predicted and prevented create tension and the expectation the state will not overstep its role in families' lives. Mansell described the demand on statutory child protection agencies to 'save all children from continued abuse, manage within resource constraints and avoid harming innocent families'.³⁸

³⁶ Stevens, I & Cox, P (2008); Barlow, J, Fisher, J & Jones, D (2012); Munro, E (2007); Strang, S (2009)

³⁷ Barlow, J, Fisher, J & Jones, D (2012); Gillingham, P & Humphreys, C (2010), pp 2598–2616; Mansell, J (2006), pp 97–132; Munro, E (2006), pp 94, 95; Munro, E (2011); Platt, D & Turney, D (2013); Platt, D (2006); Price-Robertson, R & Bromfield, L (2011)

³⁸ Mansell, J (2006)

- 7.3 Social workers and supervisors translate core business into practice throughout the duration of Child, Youth and Family's involvement with each child or young person, and their family.

Key decision-making points

- 7.4 To understand how social workers and supervisors decided which cases warranted Child, Youth and Family involvement, the review evaluated five key decision points in the social work process:
1. The **initial assessment** made by the National Contact Centre at the point of receiving a concern.
 2. The decision about whether an **initial safety assessment** was required, made by the Child, Youth and Family site once the initial concern had been passed to them by the National Contact Centre.
 3. The decision made by the site following the completion of an initial safety assessment, about whether a **full child and family assessment** was required.
 4. The decision made by the site following the completion of a child and family assessment or investigation, about whether any **further action or intervention** by Child, Youth and Family was required.
 5. The decision made to **close the case** and end Child, Youth and Family's involvement with a child or young person.

Initial notifications to the National Contact Centre

Information gathering

- 7.5 The National Contact Centre is the primary avenue for families, professionals and members of the public to raise concerns or to seek advice from Child, Youth and Family about the safety or wellbeing of children and young people.
- 7.6 In the 2012/2013 financial year, the National Contact Centre received more than 90,000 referrals that required initial assessment and decision making by a social worker. Of these, 70,000 were made by a telephone call to Child, Youth and Family's free-phone number. A further 22,000 referrals were sent to the contact centre electronically by email or fax.
- 7.7 The review considered how frequently National Contact Centre social workers decided the nature and severity of the referrals needed follow-up or assessment by a Child, Youth and Family site.
- 7.8 It found that, in comparison to written referrals, those made by telephone were significantly less likely to become formal report of concerns requiring follow-up.
- 7.9 **Table 1** shows that, in 2012/2013, 26 per cent of referrals made by telephone to the National Contact Centre resulted in a formal report of concern to a Child, Youth and Family site. In contrast, 72 per cent of notifications made by email or fax resulted in a formal report of concern to a site.

Table 1: Referral methods and pathways into Child, Youth and Family

Referral method	# of referrals received 2012/2013	# that became formal reports of concerns 2012/2013	per cent that became formal reports of concern 2012/2013
Paper³⁹	22,091	15,930	72%
Telephone	70,221	18,256	26%

- 7.10 With telephone referrals, the ability to talk about concerns, ask questions, clarify and seek additional information, meant staff could more effectively assess circumstances and judge whether Child, Youth and Family needed to get involved. Written referrals reduced the likelihood of this occurring and resulted in a greater proportion being passed to sites for consideration.
- 7.11 In 86 per cent of referrals received by telephone, the social worker asked the caller sufficient questions to clarify concerns and enable an informed decision about whether a Child, Youth and Family response was needed.
- 7.12 Conversations during the review indicated a desire both to save time by avoiding telephone queues, and to manage the information given to secure further action by a social worker, were two key factors influencing the decisions of professionals to refer electronically.
- 7.13 In 13 per cent of the cases it assessed, the review identified further information that could and should have been gathered to support initial decisions at the National Contact Centre. This applied to both telephone and written referrals. However, there is currently no specific expectation on staff to proactively gather such information.
- 7.14 Social workers usually have around 15 minutes to make an assessment of each paper-based referral. While they were able to phone back notifiers, the time allocation and process-based approach was a barrier, particularly when calling professionals or agencies not immediately available for a conversation. Staff also reported some concern that, in dealing with written referrals, the lack of immediate access to contextual information made it difficult to quickly identify those high risk situations requiring an urgent response.
- 7.15 The positive impact of increased conversation between child protection agencies and individuals with concerns was demonstrated in Leeds, United Kingdom, where professionals placed a new emphasis on quality communications about vulnerable children. Telephone callers to Leeds Children's Services were able to be given direct advice and the offer of return calls for further support, rather than a formal referral for social work assessment.⁴⁰ While overall call volumes increased as a result of the initiative, the proportion of referrals to social care did not. More importantly, the relevance of referrals to social care also improved, with a decrease in the number of cases that were assessed for no further action.

³⁹ Excludes the paper based referrals from the FVIARS process as the decisions about those cases are made outside of the National Contact Centre.

⁴⁰ Richardson, N (2014)

Decision-making process

- 7.16 The review team observed that the initial intake process was complicated and resource intensive. A multitude of different decisions were made by a social worker at the initial entry point, including:
- whether the concern warranted further action, and whether that action should take the form of an assessment or a partnered response pathway
 - the timeframe in which further action by a Child, Youth and Family social worker should occur (either a 24-hour, 48-hour, 7-day or 28-day response timeframe)
 - whether the seriousness of the concerns met the threshold for a joint investigation with the New Zealand Police or whether a child and family assessment was appropriate.
- 7.17 At the National Contact Centre, processes were in place to support social worker consultation and a sample of social worker decisions were routinely checked for quality. However, social workers were for the most part making these complex decisions individually.
- 7.18 Some contact centre staff suggested the contact centre decision-making role could be simplified. They suggested contact centre staff should only determine whether or not further action was needed, and whether it was needed immediately or later. They suggested nuanced decision making about the nature and timeframe for response should be made by the site. Factors influencing this view included:
- Perceived limitations in the contact centre staff's ability to gather additional information to support decision making, due to their need to balance quality decision making with their need to forward concerns to sites as soon as practicable for follow-up.
 - The high volume of decisions contact centre social workers undertook on a daily basis.
 - Perceived limitations in their ability to consult with Police about the Child Protection Protocol.
 - Limited knowledge of local situations, community dynamics and local services in the area the referral came from.

Decision making by Child, Youth and Family sites

- 7.19 The review found decisions made by National Contact Centre social workers about the type and urgency of response were often changed once the notification reached site level.
- 7.20 In the 2012/2013 year, Child, Youth and Family sites changed between 12 per cent and 63 per cent of the decisions made by the National Contact Centre (most commonly changing the response timeframe).
- 7.21 In approximately half of cases reviewed, sites had gathered information beyond that available to contact centre staff, or had additional knowledge of the family to support the changed decisions. However, there was no formal requirement for them to gather additional information to support their decision about whether a Child, Youth and Family safety assessment (and visit to the child and their whānau) was required. These decisions were typically made by groups of staff on site, usually supervisors and practice leaders.

- 7.22 In addition, based on the guidance available to staff, more than one response or timeframe could have been considered appropriate for a case. The most common change made by sites was changing a 7-day response timeframe recommended by the National Contact Centre to a 28-day response timeframe.
- 7.23 Under the resourcing model, social worker resources were allocated to sites based on the proportion of cases the site determined required further action. The model did not explicitly account for any earlier work by the site to determine no further action was necessary.
- 7.24 In the case of written referrals, the current approach could feasibly see a referral with limited information result in a social worker visit without any additional information to support the need for such action. This has implications in terms of:
- the impact on the child and family where such concerns are found to be unsubstantiated
 - the organisational resourcing requirements in assessing a larger number of cases than may be necessary.

Did the reviewers agree with decisions made at all key decision points?

- 7.25 The majority of decisions made at key threshold points, based on what was known about the children or young people at the time, aligned with the current operational definition of the services Child, Youth and Family provides.
- 7.26 However, this was based on broad and inclusive operational definitions and guidance about when and how Child, Youth and Family should become involved with a child or young person. In addition, the lack of formal requirements to gather additional information to support decisions meant some decisions were based on limited information. Both these factors made it difficult to disagree with decisions or determine that a different response may have been appropriate.

Decisions about cases receiving further action by a social worker

- 7.27 Based on the review team's assessment of a sample of cases at the five decision points, the overall volume of cases requiring further action from a social worker was generally found to be appropriate based on the current guidance available to staff.
- 7.28 As discussed in Chapter 6, using a more detailed description of Child, Youth and Family's role than that available to social workers, the review team considered 15 per cent fewer cases could have passed through from the National Contact Centre to sites for further consideration at the initial intake stage. However, social workers and supervisors were generally making appropriate decisions based on the information and guidance available to them.
- 7.29 While the overall volume of cases needing further action was broadly appropriate, across the range of cases assessed the review team at some point disagreed with each of the different possible decisions (decisions for further action, no further action and partnered response were all disagreed with in some cases).⁴¹ While the impact balanced out in terms of the volume of cases, it highlighted the need to ensure

⁴¹ See Chapter 3 for an overview of the partnered response pathway.

children who need a statutory care and protection response are those who receive one.

- 7.30 Overall reviewers were slightly more likely to agree with decisions for further action by Child, Youth and Family than decisions that no further action was required. However, there was some variation across the decision points:
- Reviewers felt more cases should be closed at initial intake and at the end of a full assessment or investigation; that is, they were less likely to agree further action was needed at these points.
 - Reviewers felt fewer cases should be closed at site confirmation and at the end of an initial safety assessment; that is, they were less likely to agree no further action by Child, Youth and Family was needed at these points.
 - Reviewers agreed with the decision to close an intervention in 70 per cent of cases.
- 7.31 Given the subjectivity of this decision making and the inevitable degree of variability, the question is how and by how much this variability can be reduced.
- 7.32 At each stage in the social work process, a proportion of cases progresses to further action at the next stage. [Table 2](#) below shows the proportion of cases that moved on to the next stage in the 2012/2013 year. It shows that, in 2012/2013, more than 11,000 full assessments and investigations ended in a decision that intervention by Child, Youth and Family was not necessary.

Table 2: Further action required outcomes at each decision point, 2012/2013

	Initial intake	Site confirmation	Safety assessment point	Child and Family assessment or investigation
2012/2013	44,500	30,000	18,000	6,700
		(67% of 44,500)	(60% of 30,000)	(37% of 18,000)

- 7.33 A previous Child, Youth and Family study considered this issue.⁴² It concluded that cases assessed or investigated without leading to an intervention did not represent a waste of effort. This was because most cases contained sufficient concerns about child wellbeing to warrant the assessment. The researchers found very few examples of cases that had a questionable cause for investigation. The findings from this review echo that conclusion.
- 7.34 This review found that, within the current operational definitions of Child, Youth and Family's mandate and core business, the majority of decisions for further action were warranted. This included decisions at all levels, from initial intake to site confirmation and safety assessments. However, that was not to say Child, Youth and Family was the only agency that could have assessed or supported these families.

What would have improved decision making?

- 7.35 Some areas for improvement at initial intake have already been considered: the quality of phone conversations by staff; issues around written referrals; and the need

⁴² Manion, K & Renwick, J (2008)

for clearer, more specific guidelines, especially in relation to the Decision Response Tool.

7.36 Another key challenge at times was that, as the social work process progressed through to site assessment, there was a lack of robust information on which to base decisions.

7.37 A number of sites gathered some form of information to support decision making before site confirmation meetings. However, the review found the consistency and quality of the information was variable. There were key gaps in information gathering; not all assessments involved a visit to children or a conversation with whānau or caregivers. Only a small number of safety assessments gathered information from health, education, social service professionals or Police.

7.38 This is shown in [Table 3](#) below, which indicates:

- in some cases children and young people were not being visited as part of the assessment process, particularly at initial safety assessment
- parents and caregivers were not being routinely spoken to, particularly at initial safety assessment
- information was not always gathered from professionals to support decision making.

Table 3: Information gathered to support decision making

Decision point	Visited a child or young person	Visited a caregiver or parent	Information from family or friends	Information gathered from professionals				
				Any	Education	Police	Health	Social service
Safety assessment (n=150)	58%	61%	33%		17%	19%	15%	13%
CFA/ Investigation (n=84)	84%	92%	51%	87%				
Intervention (n=40)	58%	73%	50%	60%				
Total (n=274)	66%	72%	41%					

Note: this information was gathered from both the CYRAS record and interviews with decision makers. There were some cases where the decision maker was not able to be interviewed, limiting those case evaluations to just the CYRAS record.

Timeframes for Child, Youth and Family assessment

- 7.39 At initial intake, a decision is made about how quickly a social worker needs to engage with children and their families to establish safety. There are four response timeframes for a social worker to undertake an initial safety assessment: critical (24 hours); very urgent (48 hours); urgent (7 days); and low urgent (28 days).
- 7.40 Once the decision has been made a full child and family assessment or investigation is needed, a social worker must complete this assessment or investigation within 50 days for a child under five years of age, and 60 days for a child aged five and over.
- 7.41 These timeliness standards are key organisational performance indicators in the Ministry of Social Development's annual Statement of Objectives and Service Performance⁴³.
- 7.42 Child, Youth and Family has consistently achieved very high levels of performance in meeting these standards and in ensuring a timely response to notifications about concerns for children and young people.

Table 4 provides an overview of organisational performance results in these areas for the 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 years.

Table 4: Child, Youth and Family's performance against key timeliness measures

TIMELINESS MEASURES	ACTUAL 30 JUNE 2012	ACTUAL 30 JUNE 2013	TARGET 30 JUNE 2013
The percentage of notifications that require further action allocated to a social worker within the timeframe appropriate to the safety of the child or young person will be between:			
Critical (less than 24 hours)	98.7%	98.6%	95–100%
Very Urgent (up to 48 hours)	97.8%	98.9%	95–100%
Urgent (up to seven days)	94.9%	95.4%	85–95%
Low Urgent (up to 28 days)	95.4%	95.9%	85–95%
The percentage of investigations/child and family assessments completed within 60 days for those aged five and over is no less than:	85%	89.0%	80%

- 7.43 The review found timeframes were a key factor in how social workers prioritised their work and responded to new reports of concern. At sites, critical and very urgent cases (requiring a 24-hour or 48-hour response) created a sense of 'all hands on deck' and social workers were diverted from other tasks to ensure a timely response to these cases. This highlighted a tension between the need to be responsive to urgent risk, and the need for a planned and systematic approach to longer term work.
- 7.44 At an operational level, sites were closely monitored for meeting timeliness standards. The impact of this was evident in feedback from staff who reported the need to meet KPIs affected the decisions they made about their practice. In some cases this may have been contributing to less information gathering at the initial safety assessment stage, as the focus on meeting the required timeframe for response took priority.

⁴³ <http://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/corporate/annual-report/2012-2013/index.html>

- 7.45 While KPIs and critical risk checks are an important part of an organisation's monitoring framework, the review found the balance of priority for social workers was skewed heavily towards these quantity measures.

Further discussion about the way social workers prioritised their time is provided in chapters 10 and 14.

Appropriateness of response timeframes

- 7.46 The review team examined the response timeframes allocated to a sample of notifications into Child, Youth and Family. The reviewers generally agreed the cases sampled required some form of further action by Child, Youth and Family. However, reviewers were more likely to think the response timeframe could have been longer than that allocated; that is, the situation did not require such an urgent response. This was especially so with referrals around neglect and parenting difficulties, which did not always need an urgent safety response, but a co-ordinated response in partnership with other agencies.
- 7.47 The prevailing view during discussions with staff, particularly at the National Contact Centre, was the low urgent timeframe of 28 days did not align with a high-need, high-risk service. Evidence from the review, however, suggested in some cases sites were using a 28-day response timeframe as a way to manage workloads. Reviewers asked staff what they would do if a 28-day response option was not available. The majority reported they would keep the case open and allocate it a 7-day response timeframe, rather than close the case or refer it to a community service provider.

8 Interagency working

Key findings

1. At the initial stages of a case, the level of information sharing and consultation between Child, Youth and Family and other agencies was low.
2. Throughout the social work process, social workers were spending only a small amount of time on case consultation and collaborative working with other agencies to support quality assessment, robust decision making and joint planning.
3. The current practice model and accountabilities alongside perceptions about Child, Youth and Family's role can mean there is a potential for other agencies to refer and leave situations with Child, Youth and Family rather than engaging in a conversation about who is best placed to meet the child or young person's needs.
4. This needs urgent focus to enable and increase constructive interagency conversations about co-ordinated responses at a local level for vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendation 3

Build Child, Youth and Family's standard practices and culture around pro-active engagement with other agencies at all key decision points from referral to closure. This includes:

- a) stronger expectations at frontline and national levels to work with other agencies, professionals and organisations, share information, plan and deliver connected support for children and young people
- b) leading and collaborating to develop national interagency care and protection policies, procedures and standards that define how agencies will work together and share information (with clarity on legal aspects of information sharing)
- c) enhanced staff learning and development in collaborative working.

Recent reforms

- 8.1 Effective interagency working is at the heart of the reforms led by the government in its Vulnerable Children Bill⁴⁴. The reforms signal a change in New Zealand, with a new set of accountabilities for all government departments. The Ministries of Social Development, Health, Education, Justice and others will need to work much closer together to improve outcomes for vulnerable children.
- 8.2 These proposed changes in legislation came on the back of extensive consultation across New Zealand in the Government Green Paper,⁴⁵ but also from a growing recognition in both practice and research that the needs of vulnerable children were complex, multi-faceted and could not be resolved by one agency working alone.

⁴⁴ <http://www.legislation.govt.nz/bill/government/2013/0150/latest/DLM5501618.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.childrensactionplan.govt.nz/home>

- 8.3 There is a wealth of literature on the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively across agencies. Effective, focused interagency working is very often linked to more effective intervention and therefore improved outcomes for clients. A recent UK study⁴⁶ found support from partner agencies was vital in helping to improve outcomes for children. There is also a growing emphasis on frameworks that achieve measurable results from interagency work. Results Based Accountability is one such framework. It attempts to promote interagency partnerships that are sustainable and achieve effective results for clients in the face of enduring and complex social problems.
- 8.4 The introduction of the Vulnerable Children Bill will require renewed effort and place duties on agencies to share information and work together. A Vulnerable Children's Board has been formed, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development. The Board is charged with developing a single national integrated plan for vulnerable children. In this context it is essential Child, Youth and Family and other government and non-government agencies that touch the lives of vulnerable children, improve the ways they work together.
- 8.5 The outcomes framework in Child, Youth and Family's care strategy and the outcomes framework which will be part of the Vulnerable Children Bill both pave the way for practitioners to think in a cross-agency manner. The focus is on not just the safety of children and young people, but also the health, education, belonging and participation of vulnerable children and young people in their communities. The growing use of Child, Youth and Family's new assessment framework Tuituia⁴⁷ will support a more holistic emphasis on the child and encourage recognition of the need for cross-agency working.

Interagency working in Child, Youth and Family

- 8.6 One of the key strategic drivers in *mā mātou, mā tātou* is the improvement of community partnerships. However, the review found interagency work across many areas of practice was inconsistent. Social workers were often gathering insufficient information from professionals who worked with children, young people and families to make well-informed assessments and decisions.
- 8.7 The review found low levels of interagency information sharing and conversations, particularly at the referral and safety assessment phases of social work practice. For example, at the initial safety assessment point there was evidence of information being gathered from education services in less than 20 per cent of cases and from health services in less than 20 per cent of cases. More than 15 per cent of cases that included full child and family assessments or investigations did not show evidence of information being gathered from relevant professionals.
- 8.8 The current practice model and accountabilities often mean there is a potential for other agencies to refer and leave situations with Child, Youth and Family rather than engaging in a conversation about who is best placed to secure the child or young person's wellbeing in a way that best meets the needs of each family, or developing a joint plan. In the wider sector, considerable reform is underway. New Zealand is developing an integrated and shared data set about the needs of vulnerable children both at macro national and regional levels that will support joined-up work and planning.

⁴⁶ Ofsted (2012)

⁴⁷ Child, Youth and Family's comprehensive assessment model.

- 8.9 The activity study conducted as part of this review found that only 3 per cent of care and protection and youth justice social worker time was spent consulting with external agencies (including health, education and non-government agencies) about the children and young people they were working with. A further 2 per cent of time was spent on general networking, community meetings and other liaison not related to individual casework. The overall volume of work social workers were trying to manage at all decision points was a key influence here, meaning some cases were receiving less social work so that others could receive more in-depth work.

Accessing services and support from other agencies

- 8.10 To measure the input from other government agencies, the review team looked at 422 cases to determine if there was a need for health, education and/or disability services (beyond those universally available). The review found approximately 39 per cent of children needed additional education services, and 44 per cent of children needed additional health services.
- 8.11 In the majority of these cases, health and education were involved in some level of service to meet the needs of the children and young people. However, of the case holders who responded to the survey, only one-quarter thought it was easy to access support and services to address the range of needs of the vulnerable children they were working with. This would cover a wide range of services delivered by both government and non-government agencies, including adult and young person mental health services, young person alcohol and drug services, parenting courses and adult stopping violence courses, as well other health and education services.
- 8.12 The availability of services in the community also had an impact on social workers' ability to close a case, as well as on their decision to work on a case. Investigating the impact of community service provision on their work, the review team asked social workers if it would be "*reasonable to close this case if there were other relevant services in the community*". The answer for approximately one-quarter of those cases was yes. Reasons given by social workers for these cases remaining open included a lack of community provider capacity or capability, and a lack of community providers altogether in some areas.
- 8.13 These findings highlight the need for interagency and cross-sector collaboration to start as early as possible and to continue through key points in a case to ensure the right response is given to children, young people and their family and whānau. Developing strong interagency partnerships, communication and local leadership are critical steps to improving collaboration across agencies.

9 Working with mokopuna Māori

Key findings

1. Approximately half of the children and young people Child, Youth and Family works with are Māori.
2. The findings showed limited evidence of a different approach to working with mokopuna Māori and their whānau based on their cultural needs and identity.
3. A number of Māori staff members commented on the cultural support and expertise they provided to their peers, over and above their own responsibilities.
4. Additional time needed to increase culturally responsive practice for mokopuna Māori was not currently available or formally quantified in existing measures of caseload or resourcing.
5. Significant development work was underway within Child, Youth and Family in this area.
6. To build on its existing commitment to cultural responsiveness, it will be important for Child, Youth and Family to continue to strengthen and seek new relationships with iwi, Māori social service providers and communities.

Recommendation 4

Ensure that Child, Youth and Family's culturally-based practice and strategic frameworks include:

- a) policies, procedures and systems to support staff and develop practitioner and manager capability in culturally responsive practice
- b) recognition of the time and expertise required for culturally responsive practice
- c) partnerships with iwi, Māori social service providers and communities
- d) culturally responsive governance arrangements.

Working with mokopuna Māori in context

- 9.1 Māori are disproportionately over-represented in New Zealand's vulnerable population, with mokopuna Māori comprising almost half of all vulnerable children and young people in Child, Youth and Family's care.
- 9.2 Child, Youth and Family's commitment to improving its responsiveness to mokopuna Māori is set out in its strategic vision *mā mātou, mā tātou*, which builds on the foundations laid by *Pūao Te Ata Tū* and the CYP&F Act 1989.
- 9.3 The principles of the CYP&F Act 1989 that underpin and promote best practice for working with Māori reinforce key aspects, such as:
 - maintaining and strengthening mokopuna and whānau connection with their whakapapa
 - promoting active and inclusive whānau, hapū and iwi participation in decision making

- supporting mokopuna involvement in decisions that affect them, by ensuring their voices are heard and acted on
- ensuring culturally appropriate processes and practices when working with mokopuna and whānau Māori.

9.4 The Act and *Pūao Te Ata Tū* paved the way for changes in statutory social work that would lead to more culturally appropriate services and delivery for Māori children and young people. These included frameworks and models of practice based on te reo me ōna tikanga⁴⁸ Māori, such as family group conferences based on whānau hui or hui a whānau.

Review findings

9.5 The review considered the extent to which social workers working with Māori and Pacific children and young people were actively using cultural advice and expertise to support good quality culturally responsive practice.

9.6 Of the total number of clients in a sample of 422 cases, 60.8 per cent identified as Māori or Pacific. This was a similar percentage to the general population of current Child, Youth and Family clients.⁴⁹

9.7 Translation services were needed to support conversations with Māori and Pacific families in only a small number of cases. Translation was provided in around two-thirds of the cases where it was needed.

9.8 The review also looked at how frequently social workers consulted kaumatua or matai in relation to their work with Māori or Pacific children and whānau, to support good quality, culturally responsive practice. This consultation occurred in fewer than one-quarter of cases, although Child, Youth and Family policy does not explicitly require this.

9.9 The review identified a general lack of policy and procedure to help staff work responsively with mokopuna Māori. It also identified the need for more resources, support and tools to reinforce the expectation of improved practices for working with Māori.

9.10 A number of Māori staff members commented on the cultural support and expertise they provided to their peers over and above their own responsibilities. Child, Youth and Family does not formally account for this extra support and expertise in its measures of caseload or workload.

9.11 Enabling social workers to work in a culturally responsive way with children and young people may require more time for casework in some circumstances. This would need to be factored into resource and caseload allocation. Child, Youth and Family would also need to consider building staff and manager capability in this key area of work.

Future direction

9.12 Considerable work was already underway within Child, Youth and Family to enhance the cultural responsiveness of its social work practice. An indigenous and bi-cultural⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Māori language and culture.

⁴⁹ As at December 2013, 59.3 per cent identified as Māori or Pacific.

principled practice framework was under development and due to be published in 2014.

- 9.13 A multi-level strategic approach will be needed to further build Child, Youth and Family's practice in this area. Child, Youth and Family needs to strengthen its organisational systems and practices. It also needs to strengthen external working relationships with iwi and Māori communities and the social services sector to meet multi-agency obligations to mokopuna and whānau Māori.

⁵⁰ In the Aotearoa context, 'indigenous' refers to tangata whenua/Māori diverse realities and 'bicultural' in the context of this paper refers specifically to anyone working with Māori who is not Māori.

10 Social work practice

Key findings

1. Research evidence highlighted that effective and consistent relationships with children, young people and those who cared for them led to better outcomes. Social workers said they wanted to work more closely with children, young people and their whānau.
2. The division of social worker time between case related and non-case related activities broadly aligned with international comparisons.
3. Social workers spent a significant amount of their time on case related documentation and administration and this reduced the time available to spend with children and young people. To build the quality relationships needed for long-term solutions, social workers needed to be able to spend more time with children, young people and their families and whānau.
4. The review found tasks perceived by social workers as the most important, such as spending time with children and young people and receiving quality and timely professional supervision, were often the first to stop when social workers and supervisors got busy.
5. While Child, Youth and Family had a wide range of policies, practice guidance and strategic documents that set out required activities and areas of focus for social workers, these activities were not clearly prioritised. Youth justice had a narrower and more clearly defined set of priorities than care and protection.
6. Many social workers were spending on average half a day a week undertaking social work tasks on other social worker caseloads to provide cover and support. This time was not accounted for in organisational measures of caseload.
7. There appeared to be variable use of administrative staff across sites. A stronger definition of the roles of support staff is needed to ensure clarity and consistency for all staff about the types of assistance that can be provided for social workers.

Recommendation 5

Social workers need to be able to focus on the activities that make the most difference to vulnerable children and young people:

- a) Develop a single set of practice standards and priorities focused on quality social work and reinforced by a quality assurance framework and organisational leadership. Particular emphasis should be given to direct contact with children and families, supervision, interagency work and consultation.
- b) Develop and test specialised social work services that operate alongside other agencies to:
 - Meet the unique needs of particular groups (for example, children in care, disabled children)
 - Strengthen specialised approaches (for example, planned and systematic support, urgent and demand-driven response)
- c) Identify efficiencies in case related documentation and administration, including IT systems, to reduce duplicated or unnecessary effort and time.
- d) Clarify the role and use of support or administrative staff to ensure their skills are used effectively to free up social workers for time with children and young people, and other priority activities.

Approach

- 10.1 The review considered whether Child, Youth and Family as an organisation was clear about:
- its relative priorities in social work practice
 - expectations on social workers about how they should spend their time to deliver the best outcomes for the vulnerable children and young people they work with.
- 10.2 To identify social work activities and approaches that have the biggest impact on vulnerable children, the review looked at international best practice, social work literature and Child, Youth and Family policy. It measured the alignment between these tasks and the tasks currently prioritised by Child, Youth and Family social workers.
- 10.3 For both care and protection and youth justice services, the review considered:
- the proportion of social worker time spent in direct contact with children, young people and their family and whānau
 - the proportion of social worker time spent working collaboratively across government and community agencies to jointly support children and young people's needs
 - the proportion of social worker time spent in supervision and on internal consultation to support good quality casework
 - the proportion of social worker time spent on case analysis, documentation and administrative tasks
 - social worker perceptions about how they were spending their time, and the factors influencing their decisions about how they prioritised their working day.
- 10.4 The review quantified the type and level of support provided to social workers by their colleagues and other site staff including co-ordinators, social work resource assistants and administrators. Support provided by supervisors was examined as a specific area of enquiry and is reported in Chapter 13.

Social Work Practice Priorities

Social work literature and international best practice

- 10.5 The literature contains many references to the importance of engagement and building relationships with children and young people. It notes that this is time-intensive and needs frequent contact. Face-to-face time with children and young people is universally seen as critical for improving practice and for achieving positive outcomes for children and families.
- 10.6 Internationally, agencies have focused on identifying opportunities to reduce administrative burden and re-align how social workers are spending their time to allow for more time to be spent working directly with children and their families⁵¹.

⁵¹ Walter R McDonald & Associates Inc & American Humane Association (2006)

Children and young people's views

10.7 In 2010, the Children's Commissioner wrote a report on the quality of services provided to children in care.⁵² It summarised the views of children in care about how they wanted their social worker to be working with them. In particular, the report noted that many children wished to have greater contact with their social workers. Children wanted social workers to visit regularly, listen, respond to requests and explain why what they asked for was not possible. Children and young people felt spontaneous visits and time with social workers away from their care placement were important.

10.8 The bullet points below capture children and young people's views about good social work practice, from international and New Zealand literature as well as from focus groups held by Child, Youth and Family.⁵³

- Children and young people wanted a consistent and reliable relationship with their social worker who could provide support, encouragement and was available when needed. They wanted to be able to call when they had a problem.

"...the most important thing the social worker did was listen... when the social worker listened to me, I felt important and valued."

- Children and young people felt social workers played an important role engaging them in the care and protection process and providing them with adequate information about their rights and their care plan.
- A common complaint from children and young people was that their social worker changed too frequently.
- Children and young people said social workers needed to be reliable to develop a trusting relationship. This meant keeping appointments, returning calls and holding reviews on time.

Family and whānau views

10.9 Section 5(a) of the CYP&F Act 1989 describes the following principles:

5(a) the principle that, wherever possible, a child's or young person's family, whānau, hapū, iwi and family group should participate in the making of decisions affecting that child or young person, and accordingly that, wherever possible, regard should be had to the views of that family, whānau, hapū, iwi and family group.

10.10 Like children and young people, the literature showed families and whānau wanted social workers to spend quality time with them. They wanted social workers to understand their complex situation, communicate clearly and listen to them. They wanted timely responses, reliability from their social worker, kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) contact and effective relationship building.⁵⁴

⁵² Office of the Children's Commissioner (2010)

⁵³ Cossar, J, Brandon, M, & Jordan, P (2011); Happer, H, Mccreadie, J, & Aldgate, J (2006); McLeod, A (2010); Morgan, R (2006); Munro, E (2001); OCYA (2013); The Care Inquiry (2012); Vivienne, B (2012); 11 MILLION (2009)

⁵⁴ Buckley, H, Carr, N & Whelan, S (2008)

Child, Youth and Family policies and guidance

- 10.11 Child, Youth and Family's strategic plan, *mā mātou, mā tātou*, sets out the following organisational priority areas through to 2015:
- Quality social work practice.
 - Working together with Māori.
 - Voices of children and young people.
 - Connecting communities.
 - Leadership.
- 10.12 These priorities set a clear vision for Child, Youth and Family and provide a strong platform for organisational focus. *Mā mātou, mā tātou* has resonated with frontline staff. They feel it connects strongly with frontline practice and can make a difference to support quality social work.
- 10.13 Child, Youth and Family's practice centre sets out its organisational policy statements and good practice guidance in relation to social work tasks. It describes what tasks should be done in particular circumstances, although it does not explicitly define a hierarchy of priorities for those tasks. For example:
- Each child or young person referred for an investigation or child and family assessment must have a safety and risk screen completed...*
- All children and young people in the custody of the Chief Executive must be visited by their social worker at least every eight weeks...*
- All children who are referred to a youth justice co-ordinator... under section 14(1)(e) must be allocated a social worker who will assess the child's risks, strengths and needs...*
- 10.14 In other areas, the practice centre gave guidance on what good practice should look like – for example, in relation to social work assessments:
- Speaking with parents/caregivers and other family/whānau is crucial to understanding and responding to concerns for the child or young person...*
- Meet and speak directly with the child or young person and, where possible, do so in private...*
- Having conversations with support agencies and other people who can advise and shape the assessment is important...*
- 10.15 The review found it was difficult to separate must-do tasks and processes from good practice guidance in the practice centre.
- 10.16 Child, Youth and Family's performance indicators influenced priority focus. KPIs were monitored and reported throughout the organisation. They largely consisted of timeliness measures focused on the organisation's intake and assessment processes, completion of family group conference reviews, family whānau agreements and court reviews.
- 10.17 Likewise, critical risk checks also emphasised areas for priority focus. These checks focused social workers on the children and young people who were most at risk. They

included completing 8-weekly visits to children in care, managing children and young people at risk of self harm, those displaying harmful sexual behaviours, and vulnerable infants.

How Child, Youth and Family social workers currently spend their time

Social worker perceptions

- 10.18 One of the factors that led to this review was the volume of feedback from staff members about the unmanageable number of tasks they were being asked to do. Staff reported this was reducing the time they had for direct casework and with the children and young people on their caseloads.
- 10.19 Social workers' perceptions were that they spent too much time on non-case related activities such as meetings and reporting up; that recording in CYRAS took up most of their time; and that they were often working considerably more than their contracted hours to manage large caseloads.
- 10.20 Initiatives such as critical risk checks were designed to help social workers keep their focus on the most vulnerable children and young people. However, feedback from managers and staff suggested the emphasis on documenting and reporting these checks had overridden the original intent. Many staff reported that computer-time completing notes and paperwork to achieve KPIs was reducing their ability to spend quality time with children and young people.

“Paperwork consumes more than 50 per cent of my time each week which I feel is extremely excessive and takes away from time with clients.”

“Face to face contact is essential... Unfortunately it is often reprioritized because of urgent KPI s e.g. court reviews and other reviews, writing up assessments.”

- 10.21 The review sought to understand the validity of these perceptions through the completion of a detailed activity study (time and motion study).

Division of time between case related and non-case related activity

- 10.22 As part of the activity study for this review, participants recorded all their hours of work including breaks or leave taken during the period of the study. Tasks were categorised as case related (all social work practice and associated tasks relating to the management of individual cases), non-case related (other tasks such as meetings and training) or breaks and leave.
- 10.23 Of the total number of hours recorded across the duration of the activity study by care and protection social workers, 71 per cent were case related activity; 17 per cent were non-case related activity; and 12 per cent were breaks and leave⁵⁵. Youth justice social workers recorded a higher number of leave hours during the period of the study, which had the effect of reducing the proportion of youth justice hours attributed to case related activity to 67 per cent.

⁵⁵ Note that percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole per cent.

10.24 These findings are broadly comparable to those in overseas jurisdictions, where similar studies found social workers were spending on average between 60 and 75 per cent of their time on case related activity⁵⁶.

10.25 When asked about whether casework or non-casework activities should take priority, almost three-quarters of social workers agreed casework activities were a priority.

“There are sometimes too many meetings rather than time being dedicated to actually doing things.”

10.26 However just over one-quarter felt it would depend on the circumstances.

“Supervision should be priority.”

“Training for new tools and communication (e.g. consults) is important.”

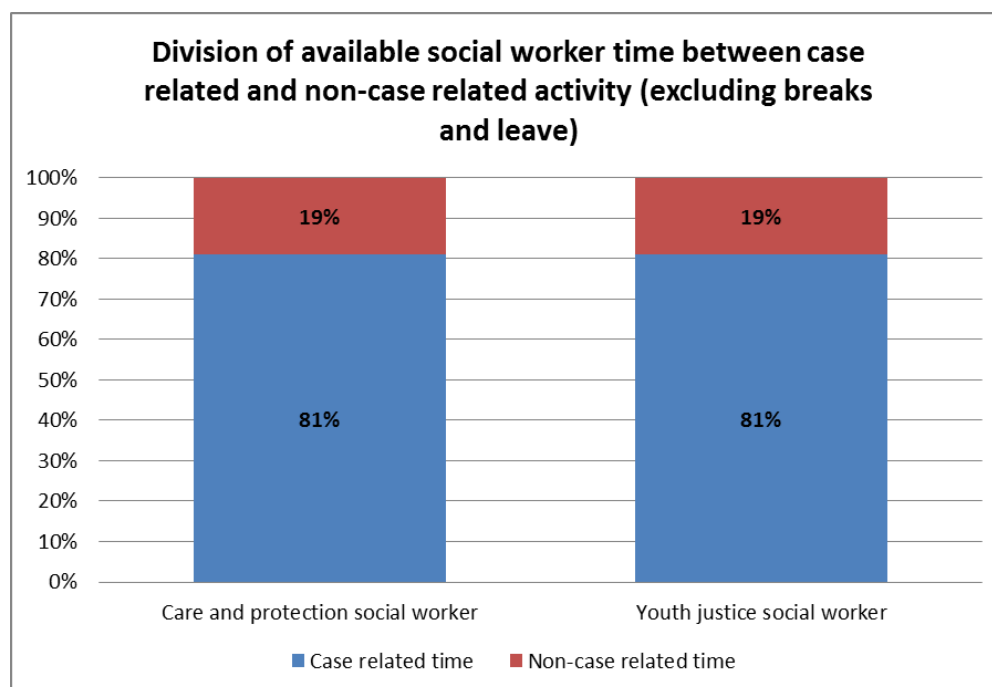
“Team needs are a priority.”

10.27 **Figure 4** shows the division of case related and non-case related time excluding breaks and leave. It provides a more accurate view of how social workers were spending their **actual available** working time; that is, the proportion of hours available for casework that were spent on case related versus non-case related activity.

10.28 Excluding breaks and leave, care and protection social workers spent 81 per cent of their available working time on case related activity and 19 per cent on non-case related activity. Interestingly, given the variability between care and protection processes and youth justice processes, youth justice social workers recorded the same split of case and non-case related time.

⁵⁶ Bagoinsky, M, Moriarty, J, Manthorpe, J, Stevens, M, MacInnes, T & Nagendran, T (2010)
Walter R McDonald & Associates Inc & American Humane Association (2006)
Tooman, G & Fluke, J (2002)

Figure 4: Division of available social worker time spent on case related and non-case related activity

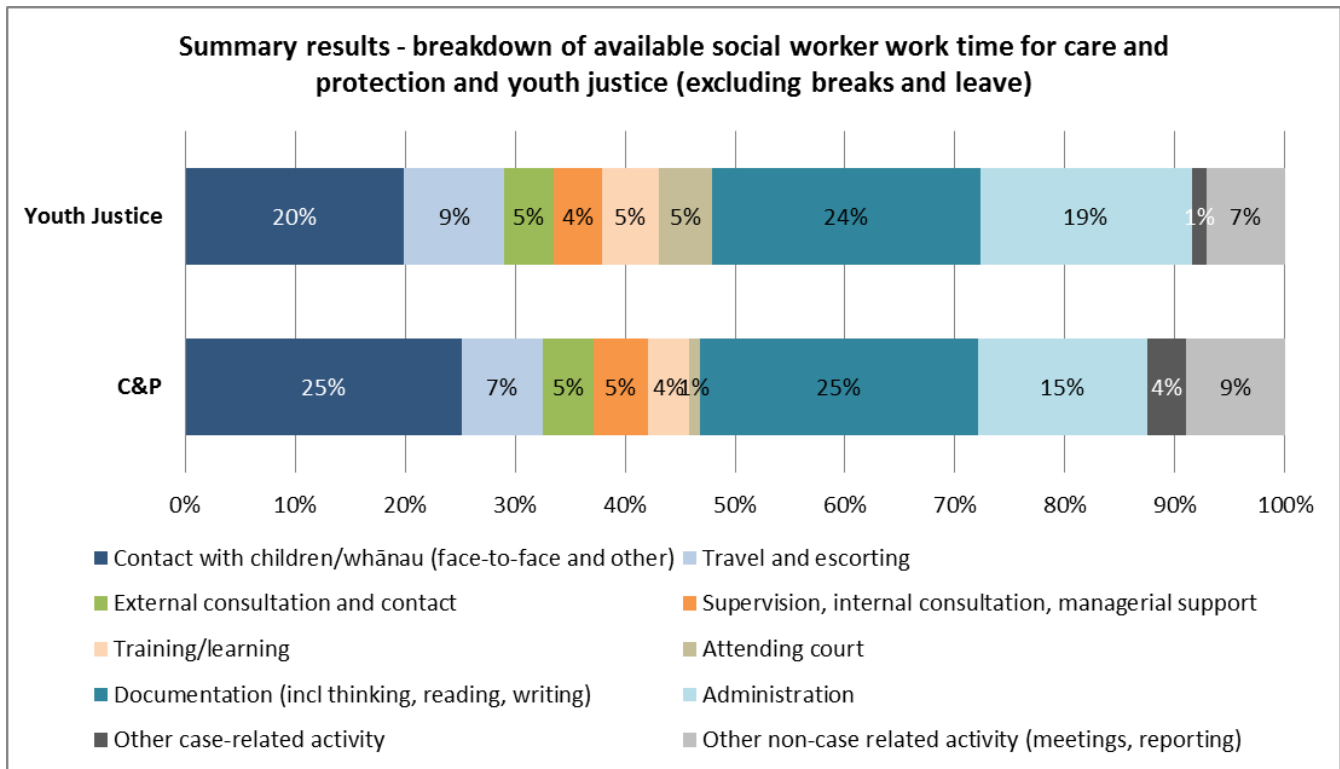


- 10.29 The review found the overall split of time between case related and non-case related activity sat broadly within the international norm. However, there were opportunities to focus on how time was spent within these categories. This would help to ensure social workers spend most of their time on tasks known to have the biggest impact on outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.
- 10.30 This is explored in more detail in the following section. To provide a clearer picture of the types of activities absorbing the majority of social worker's available work time, breaks and leave have been excluded from the remainder of the analysis.

Division of time across key social work tasks

- 10.31 The review measured the amount of time social workers were spending on different tasks during a working day, for care and protection and youth justice work. This included both case related and non-case related activity.
- 10.32 [Figure 5](#) provides a high level breakdown of time recorded by care and protection and youth justice social workers during the period of the activity study.

Figure 5: Breakdown of available work time for care and protection and youth justice social workers

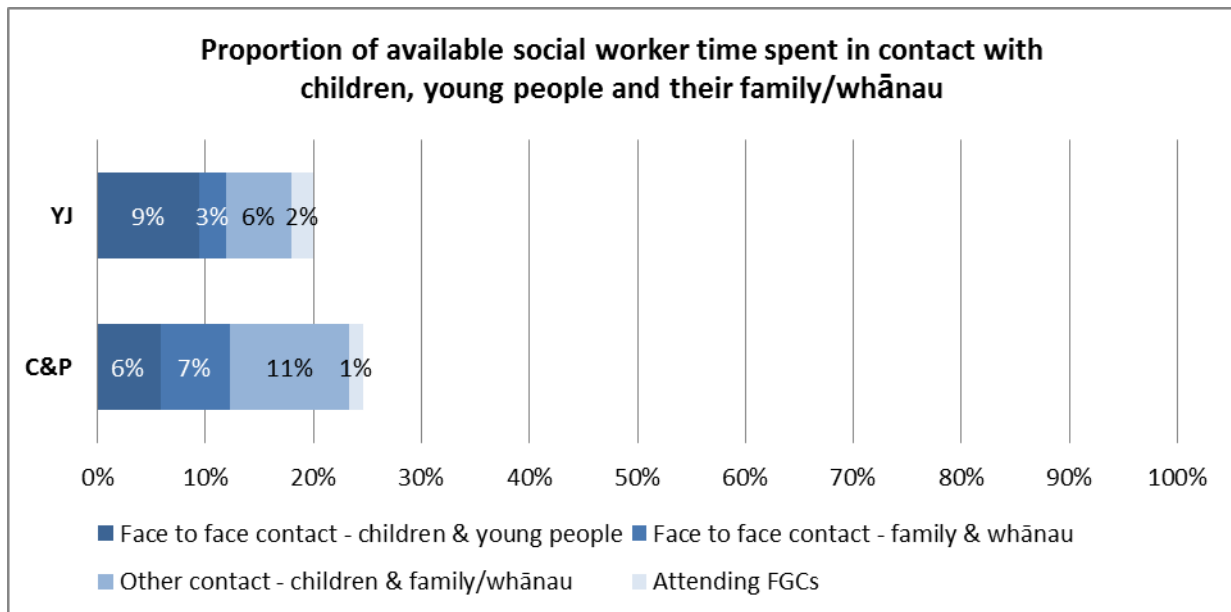


Contact with children, young people and their family and whānau

- 10.33 The review looked at the total work activity undertaken by social workers over a four week period. It found care and protection social workers spent 25 per cent of their available time carrying out some form of contact with children, young people and their families and whānau. This included face-to-face contact in meetings and during family group conferences, as well as other contact via communication channels such as telephone, email, letter and text.
- 10.34 For youth justice social workers, communicating with children and their whānau took up 20 per cent of recorded work activity. It should be noted care and protection social workers divided their time between a higher number of children and young people than did youth justice social workers. Care and protection social workers typically worked with at least twice as many individual children and young people as their youth justice counterparts. This meant that, while the total time was similar, the experience for individual children and young people would differ with young people in youth justice receiving more of their social worker’s time than children and young people in care and protection.
- 10.35 [Figure 6](#) breaks this activity into face-to-face contact time with children and whānau, other contact such as telephone, email and text, and time spent with children and whānau in family group conferences.
- 10.36 Only a small amount of the total contact time was spent in direct face-to-face contact with children and young people. Care and protection and youth justice social workers recorded 6 per cent and 9 per cent of their time respectively meeting in person with the children and young people on their caseloads.

- 10.37 Care and protection social workers spent 7 per cent of their time meeting in person with family and whānau. Youth justice workers recorded less time with family and whānau, at 3 per cent.
- 10.38 Care and protection social workers spent 11 per cent of their available time contacting children and whānau by email, text, telephone and letter. Youth justice social workers spent half this time, at 6 per cent.

Figure 6: Available social worker time spent in contact with children, young people and their family/whānau



- 10.39 Social workers surveyed as part of this review agreed that spending time with children and young people should be a priority task. Nearly half the survey respondents (46 per cent) reported less than 5 hours a week face-to-face with children, young people and their family/whānau. However, nearly all (90 per cent) said they wanted to spend more than this, if they had greater capacity to do so.
- 10.40 The majority of social workers surveyed felt the time they spent with children and young people did not always meet the needs of the child, nor did they feel it was always sufficient for them to do what they needed to do.
- Only one in five social workers (20 per cent) surveyed agreed the time they spent with the children and young people on their caseload was sufficient for them to do what they needed to do.
 - Less than one-quarter (23 per cent) of the social workers surveyed agreed the quality time spent with children and young people on their caseloads met the needs of the children and young people.

External consultation and contact with professionals, providers and partner agencies

- 10.41 The review found that only a small amount of social worker time was dedicated to joint working, external consultation and collaboration with partner agencies, providers and professionals involved in the lives of children and young people.

10.42 Within the total time available for casework, care and protection social workers spent 3 per cent of their time consulting externally about the children and young people they were working with. A further 2 per cent of time was spent on general networking, community meetings and liaison not related to individual cases. The results were similar for youth justice social workers.

10.43 Meaningful change and positive outcomes for vulnerable children and young people requires genuine partnership, communication and collaboration across the statutory and non-government agencies involved in these children's lives. Given the importance of this, a notably small proportion of time is being spent on interagency work.

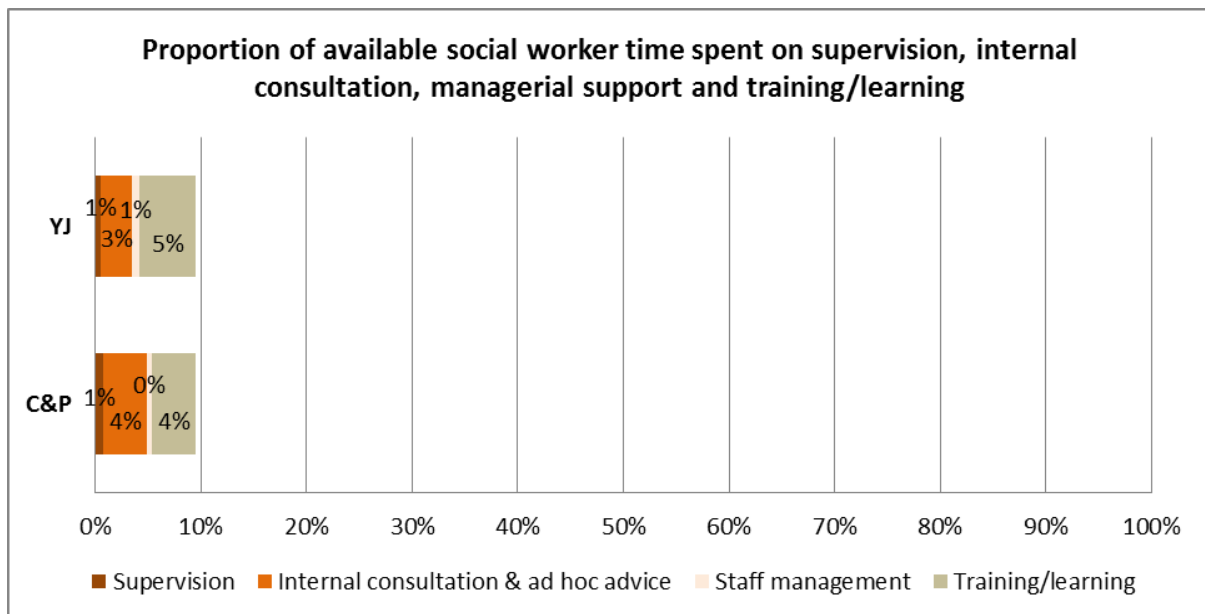
Supervision, internal consultation and managerial support

10.44 The activity study recorded time spent on receiving professional supervision, managerial support, and consulting internally on practice with colleagues, practice leaders and supervisors. Care and protection social workers spent 5 per cent of their available time on these activities during the period of the study. For youth justice social workers, the proportion of time was 4 per cent.

10.45 Learning and training took up 4 per cent of care and protection social worker time and 5 per cent of youth justice social worker time.

10.46 [Figure 7](#) provides a detailed breakdown of this time.

Figure 7: Available social worker time spent on supervision, internal consultation, managerial support and training/learning⁵⁷



10.47 Both care and protection and youth justice social workers recorded a very small amount of time (1 per cent) engaged in supervision; that is, formal, individual professional supervision to support good quality, reflective, child-centred practice.

⁵⁷ Due to rounding, totals for youth justice add to 10%. Note that actual youth justice social worker time recorded in total across this area of activity was 9%.

- 10.48 Internal consultation and advice to support social work practice took 4 per cent of time for care and protection social workers and 3 per cent for youth justice social workers. In addition to ad hoc advice and support for colleagues, current practice guidance requires social workers to formally consult with others about the case at key decision points to support analysis and planning. These consultations involve a range of staff including supervisors, practice leaders and colleagues.
- 10.49 Staff had mixed opinions about whether consultation processes were as effective and efficient as they could be. Good social work practice requires open, transparent and reflective decision making and it is important decisions are not made in isolation. Case consultation supports safety and critical challenge. It gives social workers access to different perspectives and experience to support key decisions about the lives of children.
- 10.50 As well as more time with children and families/whānau, the majority of surveyed case holders reported they would like more time for case consultation, planning, learning and supervision.
- 10.51 High quality supervision has consistently been identified as a key factor supporting effective social work practice for children and young people.⁵⁸ The review found more time needs to be available and dedicated to this key component of professional practice. A more detailed discussion of current supervision practice, including the barriers to timely and quality professional supervision, is provided in Chapter 13.

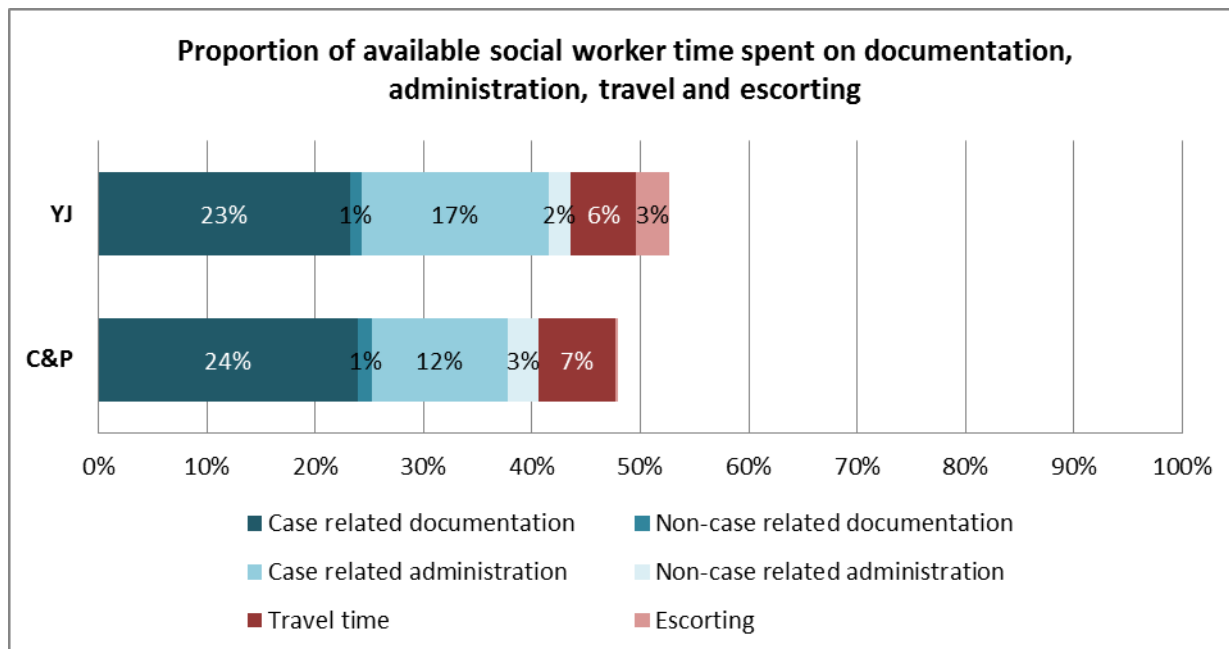
Documentation, administration, travel and escorting

- 10.52 Documentation and administration were the most time consuming areas of work for social workers. Together, documentation and administration comprised 40 per cent of the work activity undertaken by care and protection social workers during the period of the activity study. For youth justice social workers, this was slightly more at 43 per cent.
- 10.53 The vast majority of this time was spent on case related documentation and administration work, as demonstrated by [Figure 8](#) below. Only a small amount of time was spent on non-case related documentation and administration activity.
- 10.54 Case related documentation was more than simply writing. It included other desk time to consolidate and analyse information, thinking, drafting notes and court reports, making applications to court and referrals to services. Case related administration included booking rooms, booking cars to visit children and their whānau, making appointments, sourcing documents, other agency assessments and correspondence, and providing information for courts.
- 10.55 The findings of the activity study supported staff and manager views that paperwork and desk time were taking up a significant amount of their day and were reducing the time available to work directly with children, young people and families.
- 10.56 Many respondents expressed frustration at the amount of time spent on the computer doing 'paper work'. Many also voiced frustration about inefficiency and duplication, where the same kind of information needed to be recorded in multiple places. The review asked social workers about the one thing they would change to make managing workloads easier. The third most common answer (after 'more staff' and

⁵⁸ Kadushin, A & Harkness, D (2002); Marion Bogo & Kathryn McKnight (2008); Ofsted (2012)

'more manageable workloads') was a request for a more integrated, streamlined and mobile recording/IT system to reduce the impact of documentation on social worker time.

Figure 8: Available social worker time spent on documentation, administration, travel and escorting



How social workers prioritise their tasks

- 10.57 When interviewed, youth justice social workers showed a clear understanding of their top priority task; undertaking actions determined by the Youth Court. Meeting and talking with young people was the second highest priority reported by youth justice social workers.
- 10.58 Care and protection social workers highlighted a range of drivers that influenced how they prioritised time in their working day. In particular, they noted case criticality, KPIs, court and critical risk checks. In practice, these translated into responding to critical notifications on time, undertaking 8-weekly visits to children in care, and meeting critical risk check requirements for vulnerable infants as well as children and young people at risk of self-harm.
- 10.59 Social workers were surveyed about how they wanted to spend their work time. Most wanted:
- more time with children, young people, family and whānau
 - more time on case consultation, planning, learning and supervision
 - less time on documentation and non-case related activities.
- 10.60 When asked what tasks they stopped doing first when they got busy, all social workers highlighted CYRAS case noting. However, professional supervision and meeting with children and young people also ceased when social workers got busy, despite acknowledging these were some of the most important things to do.

- 10.61 Child, Youth and Family had a wide range of policies, practice guidance and strategic documents that set out required activities for social workers. However, there were opportunities for clearer and more consistent messaging to staff about what these must do tasks were. When work pressures rose, social workers needed to be clear about the tasks to carry on with that led to the best outcomes for vulnerable children, and the tasks they should cease.
- 10.62 Likewise, Child, Youth and Family policy set out the required and desirable practice for cases of differing levels of complexity and need. However, Child, Youth and Family had not formally quantified complexity and need when calculating the amount of time needed to deliver core tasks to the volume and profile of children and young people it was working with. This made it difficult to determine whether current policies and procedures were achievable for social workers based on the size and complexity of their current caseloads.

Co-working with other social workers

- 10.63 In the practice centre, the review found limited guidance on co-working, or expectations and accountabilities of co-workers. Apart from some very clear requirements about the management of children placed out of their home district and subsequent case transfers, there were no specific expectations about co-working on a particular case.
- 10.64 The practice centre did contain broad guidance around co-working for particular tasks. These tasks included preparing for a visit, completing caregiver assessments for family/whānau, multi-agency safety planning, working with children in residences and managing allegations of abuse, neglect or harm by a caregiver. However, generally the guidance was for consideration, rather than directions for action.
- 10.65 Under Child, Youth and Family's Pay and Development System, new graduates (on step one of the system) were required to work under guidance and support, including co-working with experienced practitioners. Many staff spoke to the Chief Social Worker about local policies requiring a second staff member to accompany a social worker on a first visit to a family following a new report of concern (for safety reasons). Joint visiting might also occur in other circumstances – for example, if the family was known to be difficult to engage or had made previous threats to Child, Youth and Family staff members.
- 10.66 Co-working can have a number of benefits, including:
- supporting worker safety
 - supporting inexperienced workers or highly complex cases
 - making use of another worker's previous knowledge of a family
 - having a second social worker with detailed knowledge of the case to provide cover during worker leave or absence, particularly for complex cases
 - enabling the provision of cultural input and expertise.
- 10.67 However, in certain circumstances the benefits of co-working must also be weighed against the impact on workloads and social workers' capacity to carry out the core tasks of their own caseloads.
- 10.68 Of the 422 cases reviewed, only 6 per cent had formal co-workers allocated to them in CYRAS by a supervisor. The review team felt a formal co-worker would have been

appropriate in more than twice that many cases (16 per cent) for the reasons outlined above.

- 10.69 The 6 per cent of cases being co-worked translated into a much larger proportion of social workers involved in co-working. Of the social workers interviewed, 22 per cent of social workers reported they had recently carried out activities for cases for which they were formally a co-worker. The main types of activities were core social work tasks such as meeting with children, consulting with professionals, documentation on CYRAS and monitoring children's plans.
- 10.70 These social workers reported spending on average approximately 7.4 hours a fortnight, or 3.7 hours a week on co-working activities. This work was not accounted for in measures of caseload.
- 10.71 A very high number of social workers also reported carrying out tasks on cases to which they were not formally allocated as a key or co-worker. More than three out of four social workers interviewed (77 per cent) had completed such tasks in the previous 2-week period. The types of activities were the same as for the allocated co-workers above; that is, core social work tasks such as meeting with children, consulting with professionals, documentation on CYRAS and monitoring of plans.
- 10.72 Similarly to formally allocated co-workers, these social workers spent 7.9 hours a fortnight, or 3.95 hours a week on co-working activities.
- 10.73 This indicated that, despite a lower level of formal co-working, most social workers were informally carrying out core social work tasks for cases not reflected on their own caseload.
- 10.74 Child, Youth and Family currently has no formal method for capturing the amount of time social workers spend working on cases not allocated to them in CYRAS. Future measures of caseload and time available for casework would need to take this into account.
- 10.75 The development of clearer and more formalised guidance around the types of cases, tasks and circumstances that require a co-worker, alongside more specific expectations around the role and accountability of the co-worker, would also help.

Casework assistance from other Child, Youth and Family staff

- 10.76 In addition to work undertaken by social workers, the review explored the casework support offered by Child, Youth and Family support staff.⁵⁹
- 10.77 Social work resource assistants and administrators in 27 sites were asked to describe what support they provided to social workers. Youth justice support staff tended to describe concrete tasks they had clear ownership of. Care and protection support staff tended to describe general assistance, as and when requested by a social worker.
- 10.78 Support staff reported carrying out several main activities to help social workers. These included arranging meetings, taking minutes, writing case notes on CYRAS, escorting children and young people, taking children and young people to appointments, and

⁵⁹ Of the 422 cases reviewed, fewer than 1 per cent had CYRAS allocations for differential response co-ordinators, residential social workers and specialist services workers. Therefore the review did not consider these roles any further.

caring for clients in the office. In almost half of the sites where support staff were interviewed, they also reported involvement in core social work tasks. These included meeting and talking with children and young people, consulting with professionals and supervising access.

- 10.79 The activity study found youth justice support staff spent more time on case related tasks than their care and protection counterparts (43 per cent and 38 per cent respectively). The majority of these tasks were focused on case related administration functions.
- 10.80 Interviews indicated that the willingness of individual staff members along with manager direction mostly accounted for the different tasks undertaken by support staff. The review found that a stronger definition of support staff roles and how specific roles should assist social workers would enable better work planning, clearer expectations for staff and more equitable support to social workers.
- 10.81 Support staff in 56 per cent of the sites visited thought the tasks they undertook were appropriate to their role.
- 10.82 Support staff who responded to the online survey reported the following points:
- They were conscious that social workers are stretched and would like to do more to support them.
 - Most felt they were already at capacity or overloaded and already doing all they could to help social workers.
- 10.83 One staff member commented on a perceived lack of formal induction and training for support staff:
- “Social work is a qualified job and social work resource assistants are not qualified, not inducted and not trained. If they were inducted, they could possibly be better help.”*
- 10.84 Some support staff also noted they did not receive supervision for the social work tasks they were undertaking.
- 10.85 Although not a direct area of focus for this review, youth justice support staff overwhelmingly reported they would be reluctant or unwilling to return to jobs in care and protection teams. Reasons included perceptions that the work of their youth justice colleagues was more proactively managed and under control than that of their care and protection counterparts. It was felt that youth justice staff members were not expected to manage frequent crises to the same extent as their care and protection colleagues.

11 Cases and caseloads

Key findings

1. The review found the different approaches to defining a case between care protection and youth justice made it difficult to compare caseloads and workloads or to measure relative capacity between the two.
2. The definition of a case in youth justice work was more clearly defined, generally as a single child or young person. Cases in care and protection work were typically defined as a family, and the features of these cases varied significantly. This meant there was potential for considerable variability in size and complexity across care and protection caseloads.
3. A clearer and commonly-applied definition of a care and protection case is needed. The starting point for the definition should be an individual child or young person with an active assessment or plan rather than a family.
4. The review found a number of care and protection social workers were holding unreasonably high caseloads. Priority action needs to be taken to reduce caseloads for these staff.
5. Youth justice caseloads were considerably smaller than care and protection caseloads, and sat more reasonably within available international benchmarks.
6. A number of staff (such as supervisors) who were not designated care and protection social workers were holding care and protection caseloads.
7. Limitations in payroll and HR data presented a barrier to effective caseload analysis and monitoring at an organisational level.
8. There was a need for organisational tools, policy, guidelines and expectations to support supervisors and managers to equitably allocate cases and to monitor social worker caseloads and workloads. Improved data systems would also allow more effective caseload analysis and management.
9. Opportunities existed for Child, Youth and Family to formalise clear guidelines about appropriate caseloads, and the factors to be considered when determining the number and weight of cases that could reasonably be managed by a social worker.

Recommendation 6

Define and actively manage caseload volumes:

- a) Re-set the measure for care and protection caseload to account for:
 - the number of children being actively worked with
 - the nature and complexity of the work, including cultural needs
 - practical considerations such as remoteness, travelling times etc.
- b) Develop guidelines around co-working and cover arrangements and take these into account when measuring caseload.
- c) Create organisational policy, standards and guidelines on manageable and appropriate caseloads alongside data and management systems to support, implement, monitor and review them.
- d) As a priority, assess social workers' caseloads and safely reduce those that are unreasonably high.

Defining a case

- 11.1 A case is the unit of measurement for workload in social work. A social worker's caseload and associated workload is measured by the number of cases held by that social worker. Therefore, a clear definition of a case is central to any workload or caseload management debate. A commonly understood and applied definition of case also helps to ensure clear accountability for social workers.
- 11.2 In youth justice services, an individual case was generally defined as a child or young person who had offended. In most cases, one case equated to a single child or young person.⁶⁰
- 11.3 Defining a case as an individual child or young person is clear, allowing the volume of youth justice work to be more easily measured and managed at individual, site and organisational levels.
- 11.4 However, the review found the care and protection definition of an individual case or a unit of work was less clear. This made it much more difficult for care and protection caseloads to be easily measured.
- 11.5 A case in care and protection work was typically defined as a 'family'. Child, Youth and Family's CYRAS system was set up to record and report cases in this way. However, the review found the number of children and the number of households within a single care and protection case varied significantly. Defining a family as a case was far more complex than counting a single child as a case. For example, two siblings living in the same home may be set up in CYRAS and allocated to a social worker as a single case. Likewise, a family with five siblings in care living in three different households may also to be counted as a single case, and allocated to a social worker on that basis.
- 11.6 Internationally, while the word 'case' was repeatedly referred to in social work literature, it was often used without an explicit definition or description of how a case was measured. More commonly defined were the concepts of caseload, workload and caseload/workload management.

Proposed definition of a case

- 11.7 The review found that, to effectively manage social worker caseloads, Child, Youth and Family needed to develop a common, clear definition about what counted as a single case for care and protection work.
- 11.8 A clearer definition of a care and protection case would enable:
- frontline supervisors and site managers to more effectively manage and oversee individual social worker caseloads and workloads
 - fairer allocation of social workers across sites
 - more accurate monitoring and trending of the organisational workload of Child, Youth and Family, including volumes and type of work, as well as social worker and site capacity
 - clearer accountability and responsibilities for social workers

⁶⁰ Note that some exceptions to this were identified, such as siblings involved with youth justice services who were set up in the system as a single 'case' but in practice were being managed individually.

- improved strategic decision making and prioritisation of social worker time and resource.
- 11.9 Workshops carried out as part of this review agreed that, in principle, the starting point for the definition of a case should be an individual child or young person with an active assessment or plan rather than a family. However, there were some areas of efficiency staff felt would need to be factored into this definition, such as time savings in completing social work processes for multiple siblings.
- 11.10 Defining a care and protection case as an individual child or young person with an active assessment or plan would have a number of benefits. It would:
- support a child-centred model of practice, with each social worker responsible for a number of individual children and young people rather than a number of cases
 - enable work to be distributed with greater transparency across social workers, teams and sites
 - create a more child-centred way of engaging in conversations with stakeholders, including the general public, about Child, Youth and Family's work
 - make it easier to measure the total work Child, Youth and Family was managing at any given time, to support effective strategic oversight and prioritisation of resources.
- 11.11 Any change to the definition of a case for care and protection work would need to ensure that processes and mechanisms for case recording, while focusing on individual children and young people, did not create unnecessary and burdensome duplication for staff.

Defining an appropriate 'caseload'

- 11.12 The review found the different approaches Child, Youth and Family took to defining a case in care protection and youth justice made it difficult to compare caseloads and workloads or to measure relative capacity between the two. Many managers spoken with perceived inequities in caseload between care and protection and youth justice social workers.

"The current model is not equitable due to the separation between C&P and YJ".

Literature on caseload management processes

- 11.13 The literature on caseload and workload management is substantial. A general theme is that, for professionals to be effective in their role, they must have sufficient time to do their work and receive quality support and advice in often challenging and complex situations. Where social workers did not have sufficient time to do the work required of them, the literature⁶¹ suggested that consequences could include:
- a reduction in the quality of social work practice
 - social workers cutting corners, or feeling pressure to do so
 - staff working excessive hours to fulfil the requirements of their role

⁶¹ British Association of Social Workers (2010); NSW Department of Community Services (2007); US Department of Health and Human Services (2010)

- staff becoming stressed, sick, and the quality of their work deteriorating
 - absenteeism and high turnover rates
 - declining levels of morale and social worker motivation.
- 11.14 Literature also suggested a connection between staff turnover and outcomes for children and young people:
- In Milwaukee County, research found the more social workers a child had during their time in care the more foster care placements they had⁶².
 - Staff turnover and high caseloads were found to have an adverse impact on relationships between workers and families, to reduce the focus on child safety, and to affect the timeliness of decisions regarding safe and stable placements⁶³.
 - Turnover could affect the workload of remaining social workers and supervisors, sometimes resulting in decreased efficiency and burnout, which led to further staff turnover and poorer case outcomes⁶⁴.
- 11.15 The definition of a case is only part of the calculation of a caseload. Several other factors affect the size and makeup of a caseload a social worker could reasonably manage. These include the level of activity required at each stage in a case; the social worker's own experience and capability; and the geography of the area in which services are being delivered.
- 11.16 When interviewed, managers expressed a view that a wider range of factors needed to be considered when determining the allocation of work and associated resourcing:

“Numbers alone aren't a good indicator, how comparable are cases in different sites with different contexts?”

Caseload management in Child, Youth and Family

- 11.17 In the literature, systems for managing caseloads fell into two main categories. The first required operational managers to manage workloads using their understanding of the individual strengths and skills of their teams. The second used a formal and systematic approach to case measurement, considering complexity, risk and social worker capability. Both methods considered similar types of factors, with the primary difference being individual professional judgement versus an actuarial model.
- 11.18 Just over half of the managers and supervisors interviewed reported having some form of structured approach or system for making allocation decisions. Managers described a variety of systems which generally featured attempts to be equitable, share the load among staff and match the type and complexity of cases with social workers' experience and skills:

“[We have a] roundtable discussion between supervisors and social workers to decide who will take cases based on their strengths and experience.”

⁶² Flower, McDonald & Sumski (2005)

⁶³ US Government Accountability Office (2003)

⁶⁴

http://www.youthlaw.org/fileadmin/ncyl/youthlaw/publications/final_exec_summ_improv_cw_workforce.pdf

“Use of a template that is designed to manage wellbeing, with cases weighted.”

- 11.19 Approximately 40 per cent of managers and supervisors interviewed felt they did not have a considered system for allocating new work:

“... [it’s] just a matter of who has the least cases”

“...it’s a bit random due to pressures”

- 11.20 Managers said they were most likely to allocate work based on individual social worker capacity, with social worker strengths, capability and experience also playing a role.
- 11.21 Many managers had developed localised approaches to caseload management. Organisationally, there were no common tools or expectations in place to support supervisors and managers to equitably allocate cases or to monitor social worker caseloads and workloads. (The exception was the protected caseloads policy for new social work graduates.)
- 11.22 The review found managers would benefit from more explicit organisational guidance around appropriate caseload volumes and complexity for staff members with differing experience and capability.

What is an appropriate caseload?

“An optimal and safe workload is one that matches the cases that have the greatest urgency with the number, type and mix of cases and other duties, experience and competence of the practitioner.”⁶⁵

- 11.23 The review found there was no single agreed national or international definition of an appropriate number of cases a social worker should hold.
- 11.24 The review of social work literature identified a range of different recommendations for calculating an appropriate caseload. These included:
- a straight count with a maximum of 12 cases
 - a ceiling of cases, factoring the complexity and time required to manage each case
 - different weightings for different types or areas of social work
 - a systems approach to managing the total workplace.
- 11.25 Internationally, a benchmark for caseload was difficult to quantify because measurements for work, staffing and caseload varied significantly across jurisdictions. However, conversations with Australian counterparts and consideration of the limited literature on this subject indicated that, in general, optimum caseloads in some other jurisdictions sat broadly between eight and 18.

⁶⁵

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/464909/cp_principles_of_work_allocation.pdf

- 11.26 Jurisdictions where a case was measured as a family unit of multiple children appeared more likely to sit at the lower end of this range. (It was difficult to find published information in this area.) The British Association of Social Workers quoted a 2009 review of child protection services in England, where Lord Laming had indicated caseloads of a maximum of 12 in complex child protection cases⁶⁶.
- 11.27 The review concluded that Child, Youth and Family needed to clarify and formalise guidelines about an appropriate caseload and the factors that determine the number and weight of cases a social worker could reasonably manage.
- 11.28 Feedback from staff members and managers indicated the guidelines should consider:
- a definition of a case as an individual child or young person with an active assessment or plan, but reflecting time savings where multiple siblings are living together
 - the optimal caseload for cases of differing complexity
 - the optimal caseload for social workers of differing levels of experience and capability
 - the amount of time needed to carry out the range of tasks for differing types and complexity of case, including time to work in a culturally responsive way with Māori and Pacific mokopuna
 - clearer expectations around the types of roles that should and should not be allocated as the key worker in a case
 - a cap on the number of children and young people a social worker could reasonably be expected to work with
 - clearer organisational requirements around formal and informal co-working and its impact on work time
 - cases held for financial purposes only being separated out in caseload data or allocated to one nominated person per site
 - geographic factors affecting the time needed to deliver social work services to children and young people in that area.

Caseload levels in Child, Youth and Family

- 11.29 According to Child, Youth and Family's organisational caseload report of 31 August 2013, the average care and protection caseload was 14 families or 30 children and young people per social worker. For youth justice social workers, the average caseload was nine children and young people.
- 11.30 However, frontline staff feedback was that actual caseloads were considerably higher than reported. Therefore the review tried to validate these figures and provide greater clarity around the actual caseloads being managed by staff.

⁶⁶ British Association of Social Workers (2010)

Social worker perceptions

- 11.31 Of the social workers surveyed, 53 per cent reported they did not have enough capacity in their caseload and struggled to finish. The majority of managers surveyed (61 per cent) felt the same.

Figure 9: Social worker views of caseload capacity



- 11.32 As part of the survey, social workers were also asked to consider their capability and strengths, and the cases allocated to them. They were asked “how complex do the cases feel to you?” The results are in [Figure 10](#) below.
- 11.33 Of the social workers surveyed, a quarter felt the cases they were managing were hard or complex. Care and protection social workers were three times more likely to report their cases were hard or complex than their youth justice counterparts.
- 11.34 When asked how well matched was the complexity of cases to the capabilities and strengths of staff at their site, 59 per cent of managers surveyed felt cases were generally too hard or complex for staff to handle.
- 11.35 The differing perceptions may be because managers are more likely to be consulted and involved with the more difficult cases.

Figure 10: Social worker views of caseload complexity



Analysis of social worker caseloads

- 11.36 To develop a more accurate picture of caseloads, the review team conducted a detailed analysis of data and management information. Social workers and site managers were interviewed to help the review team gain details about the cases on staff caseloads and how this compared with management data.
- 11.37 The review found the picture of social worker caseloads was complex:
- A number of care and protection staff had unacceptably high caseloads. Caseloads in youth justice were at more manageable levels (see [Figure 11](#) below).
 - A number of staff who were not designated care and protection social workers were holding care and protection caseloads. These included supervisors, caregiver social workers and differential response co-ordinators. These staff often had only a small number of cases allocated to them, but this had the misleading effect of reducing the reported average caseload figures. Approximately 8 per cent of care and protection cases were held by staff not in care and protection social worker roles.

11.38 However, not all cases required intensive work:

- Some caseloads contained cases that required limited social work intervention; these represented less than 2 per cent of the total volume of open cases.
- There were cases sitting on caseloads that were ready to be closed. Some of these cases remained on caseloads for lengthy periods before closure. The review found approximately 11 per cent of the care and protection cases sitting on caseloads were waiting to be closed⁶⁷.

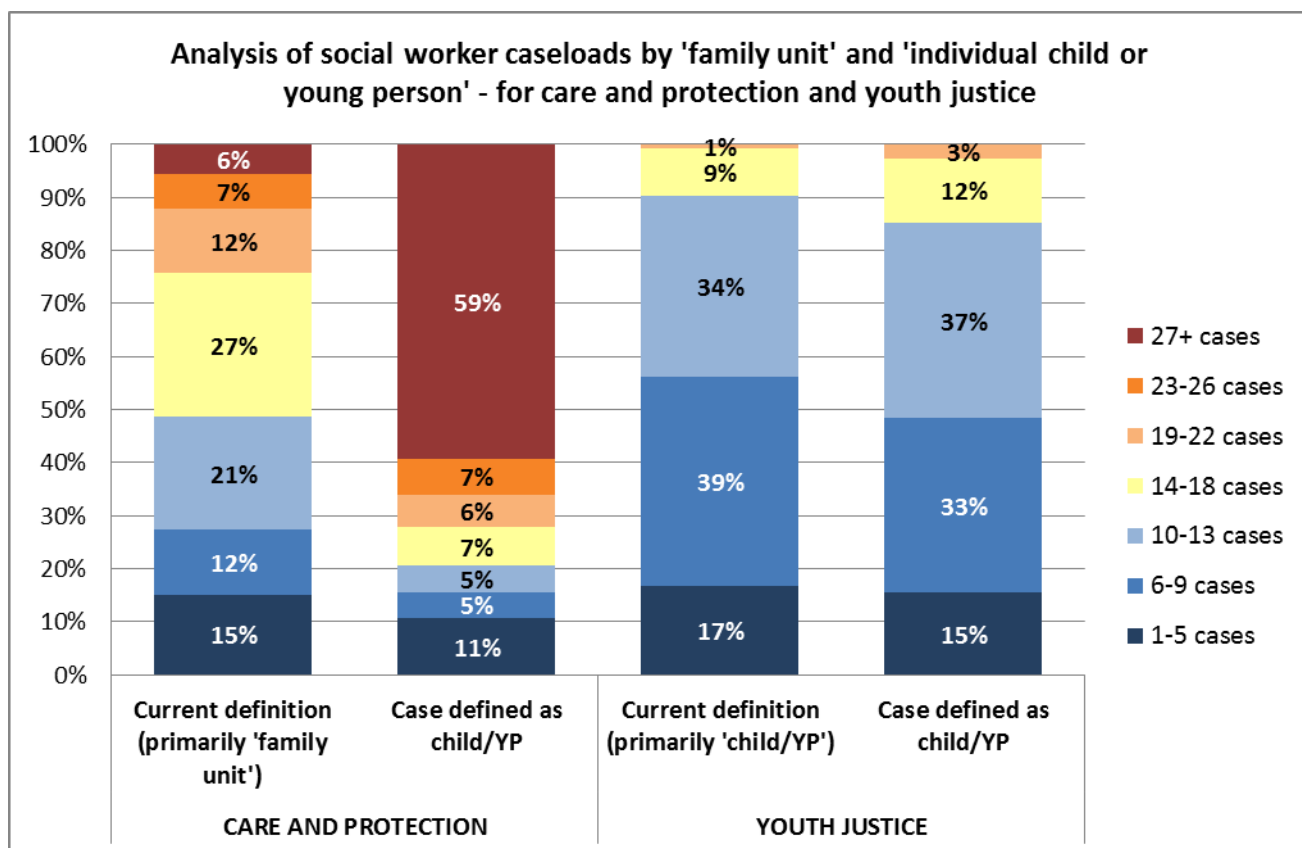
11.39 [Figure 11](#)⁶⁸ presents the results of the quantitative analysis of available data on social worker caseloads. As far as possible it removes caseloads held by staff not in social worker roles, and shows only caseloads held by staff in actual frontline social worker positions – that is, those who should be holding caseloads. However, limitations in payroll data and the use of a generic 'social worker' job title to cover a number of different social work positions, made it difficult to eliminate staff who were not care and protection or youth justice social workers from the analysis.

11.40 The left hand bar shows social worker caseloads under the current definition of a case (that is, a family unit for care and protection and an individual child or young person for youth justice). The second bar is the numbers of individual children and young people managed on social worker caseloads.

⁶⁷ Comprising 22 per cent of assessments and 8 per cent of interventions.

⁶⁸ Based on Child, Youth and Family's caseload data at 31 August 2013.

Figure 11: Distribution of social worker caseloads by family unit and individual child or young person



11.41 [Figure 11](#) shows that, as at 31 August 2013, 52 per cent of care and protection social workers held caseloads of 14 or more families and 25 per cent held caseloads of 19 or more families. In terms of individual children and young people, 72 per cent of care and protection social workers were working with 19 or more children and young people; 59 per cent were working with 27 or more.

11.42 A number of social workers were holding small care and protection caseloads of nine or fewer families (27 per cent) and children/young people (16 per cent). Many of these were new social workers yet to reach full capacity, or caregiver and youth justice social workers with a generic job title that could not be easily separated out in the data. This suggests the higher caseloads could not be readily re-distributed across these staff. Improving the current payroll and HR data would help Child, Youth and Family monitor caseloads more effectively at an organisational level.

11.43 Youth justice caseloads were considerably smaller than care and protection caseloads, and sat more reasonably within available international benchmarks. Only 15 per cent of youth justice social workers held caseloads of 14 or more children and young people; the majority were working with between six and 13 young people⁶⁹. This has enabled youth justice social workers to work more intensively with young people who pose a significant and on-going risk of reoffending. This includes providing closer support to the young person and their family through more face to

⁶⁹ Note that the total volume of youth justice work being managed at any given time is much smaller than for care and protection (as at 8 February 2014 there were approximately 11,000 open care and protection cases allocated to a key worker in CYRAS compared with 1,600 youth justice cases).

face engagement and enabling a degree of flexibility within the working day so that caseworkers can be responsive in crisis situations without necessarily radically impacting their overall casework obligations. Overall youth crime is trending down and while not causal, it is very likely that the work of youth justice social workers has been a contributor.

- 11.44 Although the review found that approximately 10 per cent of cases on caseloads were waiting to be closed, this balanced the 8 per cent of cases that were with staff not in social worker roles that should be re-allocated onto social worker caseloads.
- 11.45 Regardless of the approach to measuring caseload, the review found that care and protection social workers needed to engage with high numbers of children and young people at current caseload levels. Action needs to be taken to reduce caseloads where they are unreasonably high, with longer term action to ensure the social worker resource is prioritised for the most vulnerable children and young people.

12 Social worker resource allocation

Key findings

1. The review found many social workers were working more than their contracted hours to get through the volume of work required of them.
2. Based on high level projections of time and resource to deliver quality social work practice, the review found an imbalance between care and protection staff numbers and the demand for services.
3. Opportunities existed to take account of a wider range of factors when determining how to equitably allocate available social worker resources across the sites.
4. The organisation's approach to resource allocation focused on the equitable distribution of available social worker resource across sites. There is an opportunity to more systematically calculate, project and monitor the number of social workers needed over time based on factors such as patterns of demand, complexity and procedural requirements.

Recommendation 7

- a) Increase the number of frontline care and protection social workers in line with current needs, achievable demand management and the delivery of quality social work standards.
- b) Develop a new model for systematically monitoring, reviewing and then projecting the number of social workers Child, Youth and Family will need over time, based on patterns of demand, volumes and complexity, procedural requirements, and local factors such as geography.
- c) Review the national distribution of social work capacity in line with the new model.
- d) Ensure all new policy and practice standards for social workers include an evaluation of the resources and capacity to deliver the changes.

- 12.1 When staff were asked what needed to change to make things better for social workers, the number one answer was 'more staff'.

"....we are working with people and children and all of our decisions affect their lives forever. It would be good to be able to have the time and capacity to think, analyse and reflect rather than acting in the moment..."

- 12.2 The second most requested change was for more manageable caseloads and workloads.

"....less cases on my caseload! I feel as though I am constantly band-aiding and not able to follow best practice..."

- 12.3 The review sought to validate these perceptions by measuring the extent social workers were working more than their contracted hours. It also considered whether current staffing levels were sufficient to deliver quality social work practice and to

ensure social worker caseloads were manageable. The review looked at the way Child, Youth and Family allocated its resources. It evaluated whether the current approach enabled clear and transparent decisions and trade-offs in service delivery when work demand exceeded social worker capacity.

Hours worked

- 12.4 The review counted the hours social workers were working in any given week. It considered the extent to which their actual hours worked aligned with their contracted 40 hours a week (excluding time spent on after hours duty).
- 12.5 The activity study confirmed that a significant proportion of social work staff were working more than their contracted 40 hours a week to fulfil the range of tasks required of them. During the weeks care and protection social workers recorded their time:
- 22 per cent of weeks had less than 40 hours worked
 - 11 per cent of weeks had 40 hours worked
 - 67 per cent of weeks had more than 40 hours worked.
- 12.6 During the weeks that youth justice social workers recorded their time:
- 26 per cent of weeks had less than 40 hours worked
 - 13 per cent of weeks had 40 hours worked
 - 61 per cent of weeks had more than 40 hours worked.
- 12.7 There were a number of reasons staff recorded less than 40 hours work, including flexible working hours (with hours being made up in other weeks), staff beginning employment or transferring out of the site part way through the week, or staff forgetting to input hours worked or days of leave (although systems were in place to minimise this risk).
- 12.8 During the interview phase of this review, almost three-quarters of the social workers interviewed reported working more than their contracted hours. The activity study data supported these staff perceptions.

Do Child, Youth and Family social workers have time to deliver quality social work practice?

- 12.9 The review aimed to reach a conclusion about the appropriateness of current casework, caseloads and workloads. It investigated whether, based on current social worker allocation and the definition of its core business, Child, Youth and Family could reasonably deliver a sufficient standard of practice to the children and young people it was working with.
- 12.10 To support this process, the review carried out two exercises:
- The first exercise estimated the number of care and protection social workers needed to deliver the number of child and family assessments completed by social workers in the 2012/2013 year, to a sufficient quality standard.
 - The second exercise developed a model to estimate the number of care and protection social workers alongside the volume of cases needed to ensure average social worker caseloads of 15 individual children or young people with active assessments or plans.

- 12.11 These exercises were done for illustrative purposes only. They aimed to promote discussion about the frontline staffing allocation for care and protection. For a more accurate estimation of staffing needs, Child, Youth and Family would need to comprehensively profile the risks and needs of its current population of children and young people, alongside the time needed to deliver quality social work practice to them under existing policies and procedures.

Exercise 1 – social workers needed to deliver quality social work assessments

- 12.12 There is no definitive measure of the time needed to complete a social work assessment, because the needs of families differ and so does the meaning of 'assessment' across different jurisdictions. Previous work, within Child, Youth and Family identified that an average social work assessment completed to a sufficient standard of quality could take between 25 – 30 hours. An American study⁷⁰ reviewed a range of literature and found that task related to completing assessments and investigations generally took 25 hours or more. For children and young people with highly complex needs this is likely to be considerably higher. Likewise, in less complex cases a quality assessment could be completed in a shorter time.
- 12.13 During review workshops, senior staff were asked how long it would take to complete an average assessment of a child or young person's needs, strengths and risks to a sufficient level of quality. They were asked to consider factors such as home visits, meetings with carers and whānau, collaboration with professionals and time for case notes and to write up the assessment.
- 12.14 The answers varied, with an average time of 35 hours. All participants emphasised the importance of visiting and speaking with children, young people and their families, and working with partner agencies involved with the children and their families. They also recognised that working in a culturally responsive way with Māori children and young people could take extra time in some circumstances.
- 12.15 The senior staff at the workshops had a clear expectation of what a quality assessment should look like. Child, Youth and Family's practice centre was also clear about its expectations. However, the review did not always see evidence this was the standard being delivered in practice. In addition the review found Child, Youth and Family had not explicitly quantified the resources needed to deliver this quality of work, which made it unclear whether the organisation had the capacity to meet the standards and expectations it had set.
- 12.16 To gain more in-depth understanding, the review analysed the number of social workers that would be needed to deliver the 18,000 assessments Child, Youth and Family completed in 2012/2013, if each assessment was completed to a good standard at an average of 25–35 social work hours.

Methodology and findings

- 12.17 The majority of Child, Youth and Family social workers were contracted to work 40 hours a week. This included paid breaks of 30 minutes a day, leaving 37.5 hours a week for casework and non-case related tasks.
- 12.18 As described in Chapter 10, the activity study showed that both care and protection and youth justice social workers spent 81 per cent of their working time⁷¹ on activities

⁷⁰ Hornby and Zeller (2009)

⁷¹ Excluding breaks and leave.

directly related to individual cases (case related activity). Based on a standard working week (37.5 hours after paid breaks) this meant each social worker would have about 30 hours a week to spend on direct casework activity, or just over 1,300 hours a year. (This is based on 43 working weeks, excluding five weeks annual leave, two weeks sick and other leave, and two weeks statutory holidays.)

- 12.19 The review applied these assumptions to its current volume of assessment work and estimations of time needed to undertake a quality assessment (using 25 hours and 35 hours as benchmark indicators).
- 12.20 At 25 hours per assessment, with 1,300 hours case time per social worker per year, a social worker dedicated solely to assessments would be able to complete 52 assessments a year. Child, Youth and Family's current volume of 18,000 assessments a year would take 346 care and protection social workers devoted to just assessment activity. Of note, cases in the assessment phase make up approximately one-third of Child, Youth and Family's total workload. At 8 February 2014, 29 per cent of Child, Youth and Family's open cases⁷² were assessments. In the activity study, social workers recorded only 37 per cent of their time undertaking assessment activity.
- 12.21 At 35 hours per assessment, an individual social worker would be able to complete 37 assessments a year. At 18,000 assessments a year nationally, Child, Youth and Family would require 485 care and protection social workers to undertake just its assessment activity.
- 12.22 At the time of this review, Child, Youth and Family had 753 funded care and protection social work positions. To complete the existing volume of social work assessments to a sufficient standard would require around half of Child, Youth and Family's care and protection social workers to do approximately one-third of Child, Youth and Family's work.

Intervention services

- 12.23 The review also attempted at a high level to quantify the tasks and time needed to effectively work with a child in an intervention phase (that is, the phase after a full social work assessment had been completed and Child, Youth and Family had determined the child or young person needed care or protection).
- 12.24 Key tasks and social work processes included fortnightly contact with the child or young person and members of their family/whānau; monthly contact with partner agencies including health, education and community organisations involved with the whānau; professional supervision and case consultation; cultural supervision and consultation; family group conference planning and preparation; specialised assessments and referrals; and casework recording.
- 12.25 Broad estimates of a best-practice approach indicated a social worker could potentially spend more than 200 hours on a child each year to complete all social work tasks.
- 12.26 In the 2012/2013 financial year, 4,300 family group conferences were held, reconvened or reviewed for around 6,600 individual children or young people. In addition, Child, Youth and Family completed 2,200 family whānau agreements for approximately 4,400 individual children or young people. (Note that these agreements represent non-statutory work and are typically shorter in duration than family group conference plans.)

⁷² Defined as cases with a key worker allocation in CYRAS.

- 12.27 If Child, Youth and Family allocated 200 hours to each of its children on a family group conference plan, it would require more than 1,000 social workers just for its statutory intervention work (excluding family whānau agreements and assessment activity).
- 12.28 If it were to deliver this level of social worker time to only its most vulnerable children and young people – that is the 4,800 children in care placements as at 30 June 2013 – it would require almost all of its 753 funded care and protection social workers to deliver an effective service, excluding all other non-care interventions and assessment work.

Exercise 2 – ensuring an average caseload of 15 children and young people per care and protection social worker

- 12.29 The review developed a resource estimation model to estimate the number of care and protection social workers required to carry out Child, Youth and Family's current volumes of work at an average caseload of 15 children and young people per social worker. The model took operational data about cases, made assumptions about that data and determined the required number of care and protection social workers.
- 12.30 By changing the assumptions in the model, it was possible to generate high level estimates on the number of care and protection social workers required in different scenarios.⁷³ The model carried out three main functions to do this.
- 12.31 Firstly, it cleaned up current case data by estimating the percentage of cases that did not require active social work. This included cases that no longer needed to be open or cases that were open for payment or administrative purposes only. In addition, the model assumed a further 16 per cent of assessments and 6 per cent of interventions did not require active social work⁷⁴ based on a sample of cases examined as part of this review.
- 12.32 Secondly, it developed working definitions of a case or unit of work. The model defined a case as an individual child or young person; however, where multiple children lived in the same household, the first child was counted as one case, but additional children were counted as half a case. This accounted for time savings when visiting and assessing multiple children in the same household.
- 12.33 This time saving was not applied to children in care. Given their level of vulnerability and need, they were defined as individual cases regardless of their living arrangements.
- 12.34 Fifteen cases or units of work was assumed to be the average caseload a social worker could reasonably deliver to a good standard of practice.
- 12.35 Thirdly, the model applied assumptions about the percentage of Child, Youth and Family's cases which could potentially be supported with an alternative community-based response. By estimating the potential reductions in Child, Youth and Family's

⁷³ As noted earlier, the model is designed to support decision making. While best efforts have been made to validate the assumptions that drive the results, the model should not be used as a final determinant of care and protection social worker numbers in its current form. It is intended the model be used for illustrative purposes only to generate discussion about what numbers might be required under different scenarios.

⁷⁴ These percentages are based on an evaluation within the workloads review of how many cases no longer needed to be open.

assessment volumes that could be realised through closer partnerships and joint working with other agencies, the model explored the impact on resourcing needs. In [Table 5](#) below this was applied to four scenarios which assumed 0 per cent, 10 per cent, 20 per cent and 30 per cent reductions in current volumes of Child, Youth and Family assessment work.

- 12.36 The model estimated that, if the current volume of care and protection work were to remain the same, Child, Youth and Family would require an estimated 1,109 care and protection social workers. That is, to deliver a sufficient standard of practice to the current volume of children, and to keep social worker caseloads at manageable levels, there would need to be a 47 per cent increase in the number of care and protection social workers.
- 12.37 At the other end of the spectrum, if the volume of Child, Youth and Family's assessment work were to decrease by 30 per cent, the model estimated that 968 social workers would be required – a 29 per cent increase in Child, Youth and Family's currently funded care and protection social workers. That is, even with quite a large reduction in Child, Youth and Family's current volume of assessment work, the model estimated more than 200 additional care and protection social workers would be needed.

Table 5: Modelling social workers needed if assessment volumes reduced, different scenarios

Scenarios where the amount of assessment work is reduced	Number of care and protection social workers required (currently 753 funded positions)
A) No reduction in assessments completed by Child, Youth and Family	1,109 (356 extra social workers)
B) 10% reduction in assessments (2% flow on effect reduction in interventions)	1,062 (309 extra social workers)
C) 20% reduction in assessments (4% flow on effect reduction in interventions)	1,015 (262 extra social workers)
D) 30% reduction in assessments (6% flow on effect reduction in interventions)	968 (215 extra social workers)

- 12.38 Any formal model developed by Child, Youth and Family for estimating its social worker staffing needs would need to consider the dual impacts of both time and volume on workload and associated resourcing requirements.

Allocation of social worker numbers across sites

Overview of current approach

- 12.39 Child, Youth and Family's current approach to resource allocation is focused on the equitable distribution of social workers across its sites. The staffing allocation process is undertaken each year, using current year information to predict next year's demand.

- 12.40 For youth justice, social worker resources are distributed based on a site's proportion of the total number of youth justice referrals received during the year-to-date.
- 12.41 For care and protection, social worker numbers are allocated to sites based on:
- the number of intakes received by each site that resulted in further action required
 - the average number of cases (family units rather than individual children) managed by the site at any given time over the past 12 months.
- 12.42 A moderation process has been introduced in recent years, with regional directors reviewing and adjusting the model outputs to ensure unique or specific needs are accounted for. Senior managers interviewed generally felt this process was working well, and was supporting greater strategic oversight of areas of pressure and need.
- 12.43 Cost centres for care and protection and youth justice are managed separately. Managers spoken with as part of this review said there was limited opportunity to formally move social worker positions (for example, vacancies) between the two throughout the year to meet changes in demand.
- 12.44 Many managers interviewed expressed a view that youth justice was comparatively well resourced, with average social worker caseloads for youth justice often lower than their care and protection counterparts. Some sites had developed initiatives to use youth justice staff flexibly to support their care and protection colleagues.
- 12.45 The majority of site managers spoken with felt they had limited discretion to influence or to adjust their annual staffing allocation. Some areas reported the occasional use of a 'flying squad' of staff to provide additional support during peak demand, although this depended on geographic location with some areas having more flexibility than others.
- 12.46 At operations area level, most operations managers acknowledged they had some ability to adjust resourcing across their sites throughout the year if they felt it was necessary. However, many stated this was not something they would routinely do.

"It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul"

Consideration of wider factors that have an impact on workload

- 12.47 While the current allocation approach considers the total number of cases managed by each site, it does not differentiate between the type and complexity of work. Analysis has identified that the makeup of a site's workload can vary significantly. While managers interviewed agreed the current approach was fair in that the same methodology applied to everyone, many felt this resulted in some inequity because of varying factors affecting workloads between sites.
- 12.48 According to managers, some of the factors that affected overall workload and were not being explicitly considered in their resource allocation included:
- the complexity of cases being managed (which may increase or decrease despite volumes remaining constant)
 - the average number of children per case (where case was defined as a family unit)
 - the availability and capacity of other agencies and services in a community

- the geographic setting of the work and the impact of rural locations, distance and isolation on a site's resourcing needs.

12.49 Managers interviewed felt resource allocation needed to take account of the unique demands and challenges faced by rural sites and sub-sites. They suggested a one-size approach does not work well for these sites, as a minimum critical mass is needed to effectively operate a site. Managers highlighted a need for greater flexibility for these sites, particularly around the use of practice leaders. At the other extreme, the review heard debate about the unique demands and needs of metropolitan Auckland and whether a different approach was needed there.

12.50 In addition, the current approach does not necessarily account for social work carried out by a site before decisions about whether safety assessments are required (for example, information gathering or liaison with professionals to help decide whether a safety assessment is needed). A move toward a practice model that emphasises early, cross-agency engagement to support effective threshold decision making would make it necessary to re-visit the current allocation approach.

Impact of year-on-year changes in staffing allocation

12.51 Managers interviewed spoke about the challenges of fluctuating staff allocations year-on-year. In many areas, this was managed through attrition, but in areas with low turnover this could lead to sites exceeding allocated staffing budgets. In larger urban areas, there was the potential for staff to be moved between sites to accommodate changes in allocation.

12.52 Managers also spoke about the impact of the annual allocation process on their ability to forward plan. There was a general sense of managing in the moment rather than proactively projecting and planning for changes in demand.

Managing changing demand

12.53 The demand for Child, Youth and Family's service is variable. Changes in the overall volume of work are routinely monitored, but changes in the type and complexity of cases and in the level of service provided can also have a considerable impact on workload and resourcing needs.

12.54 While the current resource allocation approach is focused on distributing the available pool of resourcing across sites, it does not explicitly calculate the number of social workers needed to deliver an effective service based on current volumes, complexity of cases and procedural requirements.

12.55 The impacts of policy or procedure changes on staff time have not always been systematically quantified, and limitations in current data make this difficult. At a strategic level, this has made it hard for Child, Youth and Family to make transparent trade-offs in service delivery levels when volumes exceeded capacity or when new policies were introduced.

13 Supervision and supervisors

Key findings

1. Social workers were not consistently receiving timely, high quality professional supervision to support good quality, reflective, child-centred practice.
2. There was a gap between supervisors' judgments about the effectiveness of their work and that of the social workers who received their supervision.
3. Supervisors were spending a lot of their time undertaking direct casework, which had a significant impact on the time available to them to fulfil the primary responsibilities of their role.
4. Barriers to effective supervision identified by the review included staff and supervisor absence, incoming critical casework, general workload, and the experience, skill and capability of some supervisors.
5. The review identified a general lack of clarity and common understanding about the role of a supervisor, in particular the balance between the frontline management and professional supervision components of the role.
6. Cultural advice and support was not evident in many cases involving Māori or Pacific children.
7. The organisation did not sufficiently account for the different skill set needed to progress from social worker to supervisor in its recruitment, succession planning and capability development functions.

Recommendation 8

Strengthen quality social work practice in Child, Youth and Family by addressing the barriers to effective and consistent professional supervision:

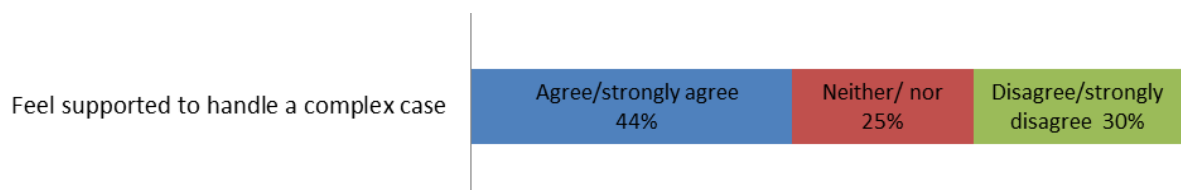
- a) Review and clarify the purpose and function of supervision for Child, Youth and Family including clear aims, standards and expectations for supervision.
- b) Invest in and support supervisors to ensure they are actively and effectively managing the quality of social work practice. Specific action should focus on:
 - clearly defining the skill set and standards needed in a supervisor role
 - role clarity and accountabilities for supervisors, site managers and practice leaders, ensuring supervisors focus on supporting practice rather than delivering it
 - effective succession planning and recruitment processes into supervisor roles
 - professional development and quality assurance to build supervisor performance.

Social work supervision

*“Supervision provides a safe environment for critical reflection, challenge and professional support... It includes time for reflection on practice issues that arise in the course of everyday work, and can help social workers and their managers to do their job more effectively. It enables social workers to develop their capacity to use their experiences to review practice, receive feedback on their performance, build emotional resilience and think reflectively about the relationships they have formed with children, adults and families”.*⁷⁵

- 13.1 The review considered the frequency and quality of professional supervision being delivered to frontline care and protection and youth justice social workers to support quality, reflective, child-centred social work practice.
- 13.2 Child, Youth and Family policy requires that all frontline social workers with less than 12 months' Child, Youth and Family experience receive formal, individual professional supervision for at least one hour a week. This reduces to one hour a fortnight for frontline social workers with more than 12 months' Child, Youth and Family experience.
- 13.3 Of the frontline staff interviewed as part of this review, just over half reported they received formal supervision at least fortnightly in accordance with policy requirements. (It should be noted this did not distinguish between staff employed for less than 12 months, who should have been receiving supervision at an increased frequency of once a week.)
- 13.4 Two-thirds of the staff members interviewed felt the frequency and quality of the supervision they were receiving met their needs; one-third did not.
- 13.5 Almost three-quarters of the social workers interviewed said supervision was their primary source of casework support. Staff felt supervision provided an effective sounding board for casework decisions and support in determining case direction. However, personal support was perceived to be the aspect of supervision that was most lacking. The online staff survey found that less than half of the case holders who responded to the survey felt sufficiently supported to handle complex cases (refer [Figure 12](#) below).

Figure 12: Survey response from case holders to the question “When I get a complex case I feel supported to handle it”



⁷⁵ Social Work Reform Board (2010)

- 13.6 Comments made by social workers who responded to the staff survey indicated they wanted:
- regular and well-managed supervision
 - skilled and experienced internal supervisors
 - greater supportive management and leadership
 - supervisors empowering, encouraging and supporting them to develop their practice.
- 13.7 A recent review of support for graduate social workers conducted by Child, Youth and Family reported similar findings. Two-thirds of graduates surveyed reported they always or usually received supervision every week. Half of the graduates surveyed expressed some level of dissatisfaction with their experience as a new social worker.

“[I] work it out as I go...”

“[I feel] overwhelmed...”

- 13.8 Social work is a complex task that involves managing very strong emotions and working with high levels of emotion – anxiety, fear, anger, rage, desperation and hopelessness in clients is well documented. In addition, workers have to deal with their own reactions to the distressing experiences of children and their families who experience abuse, violence and loss. Professional social work requires emotional energy and resilience in the practitioner, which is effectively supported through supervision. The literature has consistently identified the quality of supervision as a key factor in the delivery of effective social work practice.⁷⁶

Comparing social workers’ and supervisors’ perceptions

“Respectful and open communication between Child Protection practitioners and team leaders is the prerequisite for relationships that are responsive and sensitive to the professional, developmental and personal needs of Child Protection practitioners. Regular scheduled supervision is regarded as the most appropriate way to ensure the most effective service for clients and optimal and safe workloads for individual staff members.”⁷⁷

- 13.9 The review found a gap between supervisors’ own judgments about the frequency and quality of the supervision they provided and the experience of the social workers who received the supervision. Supervisors were more likely to believe they provided supervision in alignment with policy requirements (73 per cent). Nearly all (96 per cent) believed the supervision they provided met the needs of their social workers. When considered alongside the one-third of social workers who felt supervision was not meeting their needs, these findings indicate a significant number of social workers were not experiencing the kind of supervision that supervisors thought they were delivering.

⁷⁶ Kadushin, A & Harkness, D (2002); Marion Bogo & Kathryn McKnight (2008); Ofsted (2012)

⁷⁷

http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/464909/cp_principles_of_work_allocation.pdf

- 13.10 A lower level of supervision was also evident in the individual case reviews undertaken, supporting social worker perceptions that not enough supervision was occurring. Less than one in five (18 per cent) investigations and child and family assessments reviewed showed evidence of case related supervision during the two weeks before the review. However, 11 per cent of cases did include consultation with a supervisor outside of formal supervision. An even smaller proportion of interventions reviewed showed evidence of case related supervision during the two weeks before the review, with a further 6 per cent including some other form of consultation with a supervisor.
- 13.11 The review identified opportunities for a greater emphasis on cultural advice and support for social workers working with Māori and Pacific children. As discussed in Chapter 9, of the reviewed cases where consultation with a kaumatua or matai could have supported culturally responsive practice, such advice was sought in less than one-quarter of the cases.
- 13.12 In the activity study, care and protection supervisors recorded spending 6 per cent of their time delivering clinical supervision across their team of social workers. For youth justice supervisors, this was 5 per cent. This would equate to approximately two hours a week spread across the team⁷⁸. The current supervisor/social worker ratio is one to six. Child, Youth and Family's policy requires that social workers receive a minimum of one hour a fortnight of formal supervision (with more frequent supervision for new social workers). This indicated an insufficient amount of supervisor time is being spent in this area.
- 13.13 Of note, supervisors recorded a larger proportion of time providing less formal support and guidance. This included case consultation processes, general staff management and provision of ad hoc advice, leadership and support. Care and protection supervisors recorded 16 per cent of their time in this area, and youth justice supervisors 11 per cent (refer [Figure 13](#) below). While a valuable part of the social work process, such support should not replace formal, individual professional supervision.

Factors having an impact on effective supervision

- 13.14 Barriers to effective supervision included staff/supervisor absence or vacancy; incoming critical casework; general workload; and supervisors carrying caseloads or doing casework (which meant they had less time for scheduled supervision sessions.) This was highlighted in the activity study which showed that care and protection supervisors and youth justice supervisors were spending a considerable amount of time involved in direct casework tasks and case related documentation and administration.
- 13.15 A gap in the experience, skill and capability of some supervisors was also identified.

“Supervisors are getting so immersed in case work because their social workers are overwhelmed. [I] try to pull them out [of casework] and discuss who is leading their team if they are doing case work.”

- 13.16 The review found that, when staff were away on sick leave or annual leave, it was most likely a supervisor would pick up urgent or necessary casework. When social workers were acting up or seconded into a supervisor position, in many cases they reported that their existing caseloads remained with them alongside their additional

⁷⁸ Child, Youth and Family's current funded supervisor to social worker ratio is 1:6.

responsibilities. Few reported that formal backfill was arranged for the duration of the acting-up period.

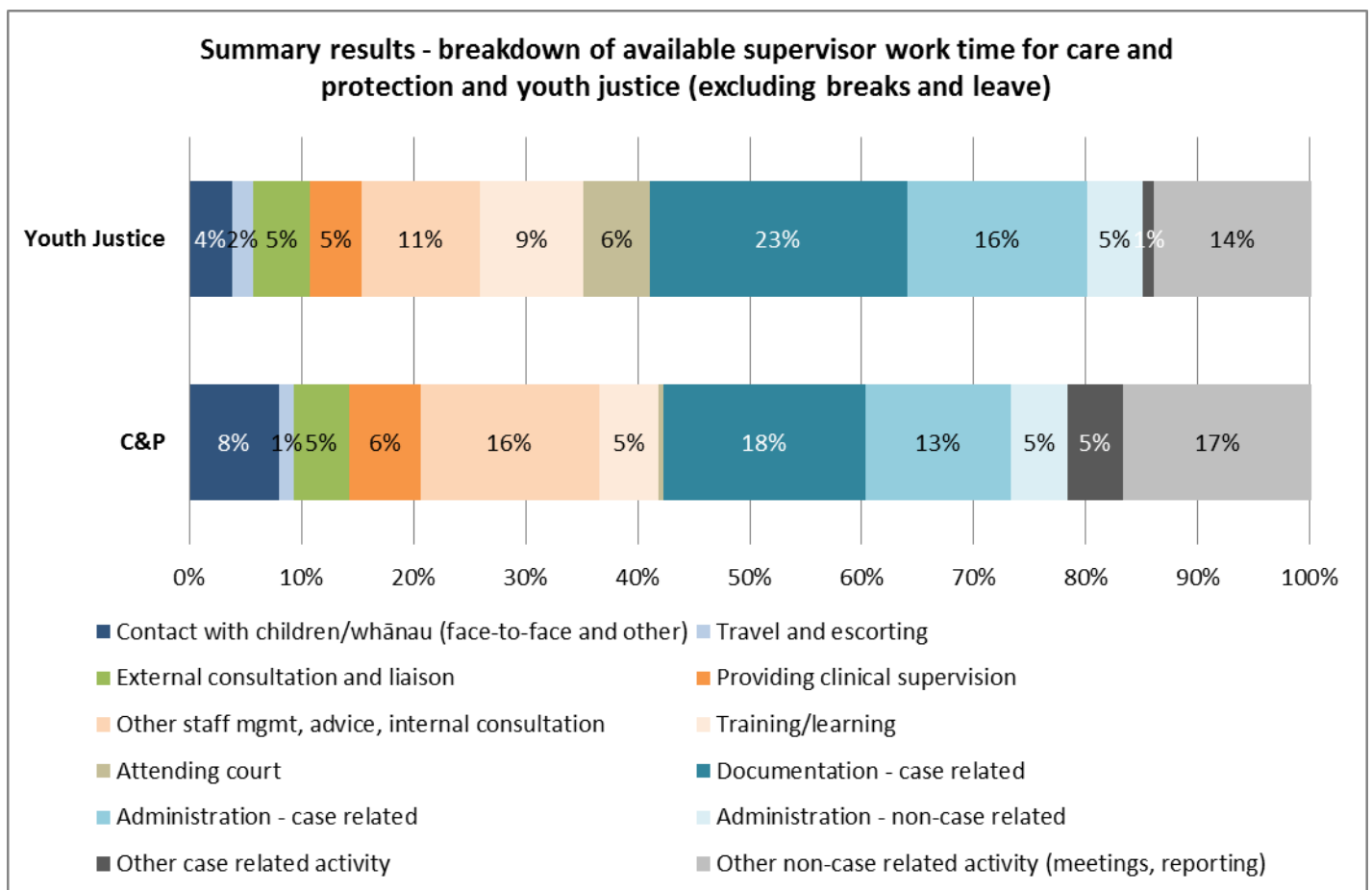
13.17 The survey found many supervisors and managers wanted to be more available to support social workers. One-third of managers reporting they were rarely or only sometimes able to provide staff with the support they needed.

13.18 The following section outlines some of the activities that affect supervisors' availability for timely supervision and support to staff.

Supervisor role

13.19 [Figure 13](#) summarises the distribution of supervisor activity recorded during the activity study.

Figure 13: Activity study results for care and protection and youth justice supervisors



13.20 Of the total work activity undertaken by supervisors during the period of the activity study, the most notable in terms of time spent was case related documentation and administration. Together these accounted for 31 per cent of care and protection supervisors' time and 39 per cent of youth justice supervisors' time. This included tasks such as checking CYRAS case notes, approving actions and funding, ensuring KPIs were met, updating case plans, and reviewing court papers, plans, affidavits, assessments and letters for families and professionals – many of which are key functions of a supervisor role.

- 13.21 Care and protection supervisors recorded 8 per cent of their time in contact with children, young people and their family and whānau. Three per cent of this time was spent face-to-face with children, young people and their whānau; the remaining 5 per cent involved other forms of contact such as telephone, email, letter and text.
- 13.22 While the current supervisor/social worker ratio of one to six appeared acceptable, the factors outlined earlier in this chapter had a significant impact on supervisors' capacity to fulfil the core duties of their role.
- 13.23 Child, Youth and Family's current job description for its supervisor role outlines the following key accountabilities relating to casework:
- Ensure the effective and efficient delivery of service in accordance with relevant legislation, policies and business plan priorities.
 - Ensure KPIs, casework and quality indicators and standards are managed and met.
 - Assess and monitor site practices and processes and implement improvement opportunities as required.
 - Ensure the Professional Supervision Policy operates effectively as per the policy guidelines.
 - Identify and manage risks, including casework risks and escalate where appropriate.
- 13.24 It also sets out detailed accountabilities around the management of social workers to undertake social work activities. The job description does not set out delivering frontline practice as a key accountability.
- 13.25 The review identified a lack of clarity, common understanding or agreement around the role of a social work supervisor. This was particularly so in relation to the balance between the frontline management role and the professional supervision components of the job. Some staff interviewed believed these components, while both essential, could not be easily or effectively managed within the one role. However, these two functions are not necessarily in conflict⁷⁹ and it is the supervisor's ability and capacity to manage these elements in their work that will make them effective in guiding and managing social work practitioners.
- 13.26 The review found Child, Youth and Family's recruitment, succession planning and capability development functions did not sufficiently account for the different skill set needed to progress from a social worker to supervisor position.
- 13.27 Senior managers were asked what the organisation could focus on to make the biggest difference for social workers. The most common theme was supervisory capability and support. This included the need for greater role clarity, enhanced succession planning, learning and capability development and support that recognised the significant shift in role requirements and expectations.
- 13.28 Issues around role clarity extended to both practice leader and site manager positions, with a clear need for greater clarity in relation to all three key site leadership positions. Managers spoke about the impact of a supervisory focus on casework tasks on staff in practice leader and site manager roles. Staff in these positions were also

⁷⁹ Ofsted (2012)

stepping out of role to fill gaps around the management of work, staff development and leadership, and 'reporting up' functions.



14 Management, leadership and organisational culture

Key findings

1. Throughout the review it was clear that social workers and managers were committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable children and young people. Among managers and leaders there was strong support for the organisation's strategic vision and commitment to quality social work practice. However, in the current system and context they were struggling to put these principles into practice.
2. Many sites struggled to cover for absent or seconded social workers. This work was often picked up by a supervisor or by already fully-loaded colleagues who usually covered only the most urgent activities. Most frontline managers felt a pool of relieving social workers was needed to improve the timely and effective management of casework during staff absence.
3. Managers were not always making effective use of data and analysis to support strategic decisions and planning. This was exacerbated by a lack of integrated and good quality data to site level.
4. The current performance management approach, strongly focused on KPI targets, was driving a more process-oriented culture in social work.
5. Organisationally, risk management was strongly focused on operational and immediate case related risk, and was absorbing a significant amount of manager time.

Recommendation 9

- a) As an organisation, define the leadership behaviour and organisational culture that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice in line with Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision.
- b) At all levels, strengthen managers' capability and accountability for:
 - leadership behaviour that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice
 - managing change in practice and policy in relation to workload
 - effectively using data and analysis to drive strategic planning and decisions
 - making strategic decisions and escalating risks about workloads and resources before they become unmanageable for social workers, teams or sites.
- c) Re-balance key organisational drivers including:
 - key performance indicators – balance the current emphasis on quantitative targets with a greater focus on measures of outcome and quality
 - organisational risk management – balance the current emphasis on immediate case related and operational risks with more focus on strategic and capacity/capability risks.
- d) Create a flexible and responsive pool of external social workers and support workers to cover for those absent through significant illness, training periods or secondments.

Approach

"...leaders should ensure the creation of strategies, systems and methods for achieving performance excellence, stimulating innovation, building knowledge and capabilities, and ensuring organisational sustainability... the values and strategies leaders define should help guide all of your organisation's activities and decisions."⁸⁰

- 14.1 The review considered the effectiveness of management and supervision functions in managing frontline staff workloads. In particular, it sought to understand how effectively social worker planned and unplanned absences were managed, how risks and issues about workloads and resourcing were managed and escalated, and the actions taken by supervisors and managers when caseloads exceeded social worker capacity.
- 14.2 The review also identified emerging themes around organisational leadership, and how effectively managers were supported to set and reinforce the desired working culture.

Managing staff absences

- 14.3 Managers and supervisors were asked to describe how they managed social worker absences due to sick leave, annual leave, 'acting up' arrangements, and secondments.
- 14.4 Staff away on sick leave or annual leave would likely have their urgent or required casework picked up by a supervisor or colleague. Supervisors and managers spoke of a team approach to pitch in together and get things done. Backfill was unlikely to be arranged – a very different approach to that taken in other agencies, such as schools and health providers for example.
- 14.5 More than half of those interviewed reported that staff acting in another position or on secondment retained their existing caseloads; few reported formal backfill or cover being arranged. Some managers said recruitment processes were time consuming and it was sometimes difficult to arrange cover or to recruit to vacant or seconded positions.

"[I] feel like I am always covering someone's position or new dimension of work that doesn't allow me to meet my work demands to the quality that I want to."

- 14.6 The impact of vacancies created by people acting in other positions or secondments was also strongly felt. Although such arrangements provided good development opportunities, there was a view they could also have a negative impact on the frontline and required stronger oversight and planning:

"[The] full impact of leave and secondments is always at the frontline".

⁸⁰ The New Zealand Business Excellence Foundation Criteria for Performance Excellence, 2013–2014.

- 14.7 Analysis of payroll data found that 26 per cent of supervisors, 29 per cent of site managers and 38 per cent of youth justice managers were either acting in or seconded to their role.⁸¹
- 14.8 Three-quarters of managers and supervisors spoken with felt processes to cover temporary vacancies could be improved. In particular, it was felt more staff or a pool of relieving or backfilling social workers would significantly enhance the management of casework during staff absence. Also identified were clearer responsibilities for the social worker providing cover, a more structured handover process, and more proactive management of social worker absence.

Managing capacity and capability risks

- 14.9 The review looked at processes to manage and escalate risks relating to staff caseloads, workloads and resourcing.
- 14.10 Most often, risk management focused on individual cases, and operational and reputational risks. Some managers spent considerable time on this, and spoke of weekly risk management meetings and detailed reporting requirements.
- 14.11 Organisational risks and issues around capacity and capability were being managed as they arose. However, they were not always formally escalated and quantified, which created challenges in understanding, tracking and identifying patterns and themes at a strategic level. Only a small number of managers reported that they maintained formal registers of risks around workloads, staffing or resourcing despite awareness that some of these risks existed in some areas.
- 14.12 When work pressure rose, many supervisors and managers reported continuing to allocate new work and taking an interim approach of 'making do' until capacity became available. Very few reported that they would formally escalate the issue. A clear theme was that it was unacceptable for cases to remain unallocated to a staff member for any significant period of time.
- 14.13 In some cases managers also spoke of moving work around and extending timeframes in an attempt to manage workloads.
- 14.14 When caseloads became unmanageable for the social worker, managers and supervisors were most likely to report addressing the issue through supervision and helping the social worker to prioritise and plan.
- 14.15 Managers suggested that organisational guidance and a clearer 'trigger point' for escalating particularly high caseloads may support greater transparency in the distribution of work across social workers and sites. For example, the Australian state of Victoria has management, monitoring and review panels that review and report on the demand and distribution of work, and respond to workload review requests⁸².

Organisational leadership and culture

- 14.16 Throughout the review, it was clear that frontline practitioners and managers were very committed to the organisation and its mission in protecting and supporting the most vulnerable children and young people. Many staff worked more than their

⁸¹ As at 26 September 2013.

⁸² http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/464914/cp_regional_workload_panels.pdf

contracted hours and had a genuine commitment to the organisation and its goal to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children. This was further evidenced by the openness and willingness of staff to engage in and provide feedback to this review.

- 14.17 Managers and leaders were involved in the construction of the organisation's strategic plan *mā mātou, mā tātou*, and supported and understood its ideas and vision. They were committed to quality social work practice, achieving a more responsive approach to working with mokopuna Māori, and enhancing children's voices and cross-community partnerships.
- 14.18 There was a need for strong leadership and a more clearly defined culture that could be consistently translated into actions to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.
- 14.19 There was a view that, as an organisation, Child, Youth and Family had become risk averse in recent years, and this was absorbing a significant amount of managers' time. Among other things, managers referred to considerable time being spent on internal reporting and administrative processes, regional and National Office requirements, and case related risk management. These sometimes came at the expense of other activities.

"... I constantly feel guilty about not being able to get back to sites or follow up with people/teams/supervisors about their issues – when I can do this, it makes a difference."

- 14.20 Many managers spoke of a focus on managing 'in the moment'. Organisationally, the review found managers were not always using data and analysis as effectively as they could to support strategic decision making and forward planning. This was contributed to by a lack of integrated and good quality data to help managers make decisions about priorities and key management actions.
- 14.21 Managers also spoke about the emphasis on performance targets and reporting. Managers were more likely to monitor KPI reports than other data, and a language and culture had developed around KPIs which had driven a more process-oriented focus in social work.
- 14.22 This is not to say timeliness of social work processes and organisational performance in delivering those processes is not important. However, the review identified that a better balance was needed between output performance (such as 'how many', 'how quickly', 'how often') and measures of outcome and quality (such as 'how accurate was the assessment', 'how good was the plan', and 'what were the results and effects on the children').
- 14.23 Developing a stronger culture and language around social work practice and its outcomes for children is needed to help create a step change in organisational behaviour.

15 Information and data

Key findings

1. Several clear themes emerged from this review around the quality, relevance and usability of Child, Youth and Family's information and data:
 - The quality, relevance, and usability of data and information available to managers to support strategic oversight and decision making was not always fit for purpose.
 - There were gaps in capability and capacity in relation to data and information analysis.
 - The data systems were complex, and there was a mixed understanding around how some of the data was derived and what was being reported.
 - Social workers and managers needed more integrated, detailed data to better understand the needs and circumstances of children and young people.
2. Child, Youth and Family's case management system CYRAS formed the primary source of data for the organisation's information and reporting. This data was extracted and summarised for managers by the separate Te Pakoro system. As Child, Youth and Family's work changed over the years, the systems had been adapted but had become more unwieldy and difficult to use.
3. From an organisational reporting perspective the needs and requirements of these systems had also grown and changed over time, and the systems had not been easily able to respond to these.

Recommendation 10

- a) Improve the integration, accessibility and reliability of information available to managers to support strategic and operational decision making.
- b) Ensure information is provided in a way that enables users to understand the meaning and implications of the data, and changes or patterns over time.
- c) Increase Child, Youth and Family's current capability and capacity around data and information analysis at all levels.

Limitations of caseload and workload data and information

- 15.1 The review found managers had mixed confidence in the reliability of Child, Youth and Family's primary sources of data and information about caseloads, workloads and resourcing. Some felt overwhelmed with data, and believed they needed a stronger contextual story to interpret the data. Others identified gaps in the reporting available to support them.

Trend data

- 15.2 Managers reported having limited trend data to support effective planning. Some spoke of limited access to co-ordinated reporting or information about matters such as vacancies, leave balances and staff turnover. Further, while they may have access to data, and regional advisors might provide some reporting, they did not always have co-ordinated and regular analysis of this information.

Analytical capability

- 15.3 There were not always enough staff possessing the skill sets and capability to analyse and use available data, with a small number of in-demand individuals relied on to provide data and reporting on an ad hoc basis to meet particular requirements.

Data systems and reporting methodologies

- 15.4 Data systems were identified as complex, and in some cases core organisational data could not be readily obtained by those who needed it. Sources of caseload information to monitor workloads used different methodologies, which created confusion and an impression of inaccuracy that often deterred managers.
- 15.5 Processes to ensure social workers who left a site or the organisation were removed or updated in the CYRAS system were not always operating effectively. Complex human resources data made it difficult to easily identify, at a strategic level, the actual number of care and protection social workers who should be holding care and protection caseloads at any given time. For example, the use of the generic role title 'social worker' did not distinguish between those responsible for youth justice work and those responsible for care and protection work.
- 15.6 In addition, social worker caseload reports used an organisational grouping of staff labelled "field social worker" roles. This included supervisors, co-ordinators, caregiver social workers, and others, alongside frontline care and protection and youth justice social workers, which had the effect of lowering the reported caseload average. Only half of the supervisors and managers interviewed said they had used the organisation's summary caseload report, and just one-third said this report gave them an accurate picture of social worker caseloads. A reliance on reporting and monitoring average caseloads also had the potential to mislead on the range and extremes of caseload situations.
- 15.7 In addition, caseload reporting focused solely on volumes of cases. Additional detail on case complexity and co-working was not available, which would support supervisors and managers in their oversight of staff caseloads and workloads.

CYRAS

- 15.8 The case management system CYRAS formed the primary source of data information and reporting. Its primary function was to capture an on-going record of Child, Youth and Family's involvement with an individual child/young person and their family/whānau. However, the needs and requirements of this system had grown and changed over time, and CYRAS had not always been easily able to respond to these. As CYRAS had been adapted and extended over the years, it had become less user friendly for frontline staff and others.
- 15.9 Some information was not captured, such as structured data on the complexity of cases, although the functionality did exist within CYRAS. This made it difficult to effectively measure the overall workload of the organisation at a strategic level (based on the volume and complexity of caseloads, and the time needed to deliver quality social work services). In other areas of CYRAS, such as at the end of a Child and Family assessment, there were limited options available to social workers to record the finding or outcome for the child or young person in a structured way that was easy to extract and analyse at strategic levels.
- 15.10 Better information would enable Child, Youth and Family to more closely match resources with demand, and to support changes in its practice models.

CYRAS caseloads view

- 15.11 A summary view of all of the cases allocated to each individual worker was available in CYRAS. This showed for each case the total number of open 'phases'⁸³ within that case, and totalled these up to provide a summary number of phases for each staff member. This summary view was the primary source of caseload information for most site managers and supervisors.
- 15.12 Because it counted the number of open 'phases', cases were often counted more than once in the CYRAS caseloads view. For example, a child/young person in a placement would be reflected with an open placement phase as well as an open intervention phase.
- 15.13 The review found the number of phases was potentially being used as a proxy for the number of cases when staff were discussing caseload numbers. Where social workers self-reported very high caseloads, it seemed these often correlated more closely with the number of open phases allocated to that worker in the CYRAS caseloads view than with the number of open cases.

CYRAS as a recording tool

- 15.14 Child, Youth and Family's policy on the documentation of information in CYRAS was recorded on its practice centre. This stated that documentation should focus on discussions and decisions made during supervision; assessment and practice tool application; critical and key decisions made (including rationale and any actions taken); the views and voices of children, young people and their families; and information that provides a record of Child, Youth and Family's role in a child or young person's life. Good quality recording helps to ensure children, young people and their families have access to a full and clear record about the decisions and actions that affected them.
- 15.15 In undertaking this review, it was often difficult to identify evidence in CYRAS of decision making, rationale and supporting information. Additional information was often gathered through interviews with staff members that was not fully evident from CYRAS alone. This was the case across different phases of work, although information was more likely to be clearly recorded in CYRAS in a child and family assessment or investigation phase than in an intervention. For example:
- Visits to children/young people undertaken by social workers were clearly recorded in most child and family assessments/investigations, but were clear in CYRAS for approximately two-thirds of interventions.
 - Additional information gathered to inform decision making was clearly recorded in most child and family assessments/investigations, but in one-third of interventions social workers advised of additional information gathered that was not clear from CYRAS.
 - Evidence to end an assessment or intervention was recorded in CYRAS for almost all child and family assessments/investigations and approximately 80 per cent of interventions. However, in 28 per cent of interventions, it took at least one month to close the phase in the system after the decision was made that the child or young person's circumstances no longer required Child, Youth and Family involvement.

⁸³ A stage in the social work process, such as assessment, intervention or placement – a single case may have more than one phase open at any given time.

- 15.16 We asked social workers what single change would make managing workloads easier. A more integrated, streamlined and mobile recording/IT system was their third most common response.
- 15.17 As discussed in Chapter 10, many respondents expressed frustration at perceived duplication and inefficiencies in recording casework information, and in completing some social work processes and associated documentation such as referrals. Overall, there was a general perception of CYRAS as cumbersome, slow and in need of improvement.

16 Workforce development

Key findings

1. The review findings raised questions about the capability of some staff to do the work required of them. There were a number of factors that had an impact on this including:
 - the effectiveness and consistency of supervision
 - the quality of training offered in social work qualifying courses (as noted by managers)
 - the need for culturally responsive practice tools and guidance for working effectively with Māori
 - the inherent or innate skills and abilities of practitioners to work in highly complex and conflict ridden environments.
2. Most managers interviewed identified challenges around the recruitment and retention of staff, levels of turnover (with both low and high levels having a different impact in different parts of the country), and the management of staff performance.

Recommendation 11

- a) Refresh Child, Youth and Family's strategy for recruiting, retaining and developing a quality, skilled and committed workforce, including succession planning, performance management, professional knowledge development and flexible working arrangements.
- b) Work closely with universities and social work educators and the Social Work Registration Board to promote standards of social work education, knowledge and training that equip staff for the reality and complexity of care and protection.
- c) Focus staff and leadership development on the key goals in Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision – namely, quality social work practice, responsiveness to Māori cultural needs, children's participation, interagency partnerships and leadership.

- 16.1 The review identified several areas where Child, Youth and Family could improve in developing and managing its workforce to deliver a high level of quality social work practice.
- 16.2 It found that a strategy to reinvigorate its workforce should include consideration of the education and professional qualifications of social workers, the roles of supervisors and specific support staff, robust on-going professional development, and stronger performance management and quality assurance of social work practice and standards. Together, these would support the growth and development of quality social work practice.
- 16.3 These areas are discussed in detail throughout the body of this report and are summarised below.

Workforce

- 16.4 A study by Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) found that agencies with high levels of job satisfaction, fairness, role clarity, co-operation and personalisation, and lower levels of role overload, conflict and emotional exhaustion were more likely to support caseworkers. This, in turn, achieved better outcomes for children, as seen in psychosocial functioning. This study measured organisational climate, based on self-reports from child welfare caseworkers, and improved child psychosocial function noted in teachers' reports.
- 16.5 Most managers interviewed as part of the current review identified challenges around one or more of the following four areas:
- recruiting or retaining staff to meet their full complement; this was a challenge in both rural locations and metropolitan areas
 - staff turnover (both high and low turnover created challenges in different parts of the country)
 - a perception of limited opportunities for flexible work, including part-time and job share
 - performance management of staff across all levels.
- 16.6 There was a clear need to ensure social work education programmes provided a strong pool of graduates, as well as more systematic monitoring of the supply of new social workers into the system.
- 16.7 A much higher proportion of youth justice social workers interviewed said they had been with Child, Youth and Family for more than five years, compared with those care and protection social workers interviewed.
- 16.8 Managers identified opportunities to improve their existing processes around the proactive management of leave and absence.

Working with Māori

- 16.9 Approximately half of the children and young people Child, Youth and Family works with are Māori. The findings of this review showed limited evidence of a differentiated approach based on cultural needs and identity. A number of Māori staff members said they provided cultural support and advice to their peers, in addition to their own caseload responsibilities.
- 16.10 Alongside the development of culturally responsive practice tools and guidance for working effectively with Māori mokopuna and whānau, consideration also needs to be given to lifting staff and manager capability in this area.

Support for casework

- 16.11 Child, Youth and Family must ensure regular, high quality supervision of staff, and develop quality assurance mechanisms that focus on outcomes for children and young people.
- 16.12 This review identified a lack of clarity around the social work supervisor role. In particular, the balance between its frontline management and professional supervision components.

- 16.13 The review also identified the need to more effectively consider the different skill set needed to progress from a social worker to a supervisor position in recruitment, succession planning and capability development functions.

17 Implementation

Key findings

1. Given the scope, depth and inter-connectedness of the recommendations of this review, a single, Ministry-wide integrated action and change management plan will need to be designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated to drive the necessary changes within Child, Youth and Family and across social sector partnerships.
2. Child, Youth and Family's operating model will need to be re-designed to support the action plan, to align with contemporary needs and risks affecting children, and to promote the delivery of quality social work practice.

Recommendation 12

The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development should oversee a Ministry-wide action plan, led by the Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family, and based on recommendations from this review:

- a) The review's diverse and inter-connected recommendations need to be integrated into a single, co-ordinated, holistic change management plan that dovetails with other strategic work within Child, Youth and Family and across the Ministry, including the Children's Action Plan, Investing in Services for Outcomes, Simplification, the Data Analysis Hub and the Four Year Investment Strategy.
- b) The Children's Commissioner and Expert Advisory Panel should be invited to monitor and review progress on the plan and the impact it has on quality social work practice.
- c) Proactive and co-ordinated change and implementation plans need to be delivered in consultation with the Public Service Association.
- d) To support the scope of change recommended, Child, Youth and Family should re-design its operating model to align with contemporary needs.

- 17.1 The recommendations of this review cover a wide range of systems, practice areas and organisational drivers, from leadership to frontline. These recommendations are inter-connected; change and action need to be led, managed and undertaken in a single, integrated and co-ordinated plan.
- 17.2 A Ministry-wide, integrated action and change management plan will need to be designed, delivered, monitored and evaluated to drive the necessary changes within Child, Youth and Family and across social sector partnerships.
- 17.3 Some considerations for the development of the action and change management plan are set out below.

Timescales for change

- The scope of this review and associated recommendations indicate that a multi-year programme of work may be needed. Consideration needs to be given to immediate quick wins and longer term changes.

Child, Youth and Family operating model

- Child, Youth and Family will need to redesign its operating model to support the plan, to align with contemporary needs and risks affecting children, and to promote the delivery of quality social work practice.

Governance and oversight

- The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development should oversee the plan as a Ministry-wide initiative led by the Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family.
- The independent Expert Advisory Panel and the Children's Commissioner should have on-going involvement in the development and monitoring of the plan.
- There needs to be a clear link to the Children's Action Plan, the Investment in Services for Outcomes programme, Simplification, the Ministry Data Analysis Hub as well as the current work on the investment strategy for Child, Youth and Family over the next four years.
- Proactive and co-ordinated change and implementation plans need to be delivered in consultation with the Public Service Association (PSA).

Communication with staff and partner agencies

- The findings and outcomes of the review need to be clearly communicated with Child, Youth and Family's staff and partner agencies.
- Given the significant contribution by the National Contact Centre and a number of sites around the country, it is recommended these sites receive feedback in person about the outcomes and findings of the review and the plan for the future.
- Communications need to continue the partnership between Child, Youth and Family and the PSA.
- Consideration should be given to how the findings and recommendations from this work can be most constructively communicated to the Vulnerable Children's Board, given Child, Youth and Family's role working as part of the wider social sector supporting vulnerable children.

18 Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Child, Youth and Family’s role in care and protection

- a) In the short term, more accurately define and articulate Child, Youth and Family’s operational mandate and core business in care and protection to:
 - reflect and target its focus on assessing and protecting the most high need and the most vulnerable children and young people
 - provide greater clarity and guidelines for social workers and referring agencies as to which children and young people may require a statutory child protection response, and which would be better supported by a non-statutory response.
- b) Work with government and non-government partners to develop clear and commonly understood definitions of needs, risks and outcomes for vulnerable children and young people to:
 - provide clarity for both Child, Youth and Family social workers and partner agencies, enhancing the ability to work collaboratively and provide a range of services around children with multiple and varying levels of need
 - support and assist the strategic direction of the Vulnerable Children’s Board in the development of both improved capacity and capability to work effectively with vulnerable children and their families across all sectors – both government and non-government
 - re-negotiate contracts with non-government providers to offer more services and support for children who are currently directed to Child, Youth and Family.

Recommendation 2 – Decision making about Child, Youth and Family’s work in care and protection

In line with the definition of Child, Youth and Family’s mandate and core business in care and protection (Recommendation 1), strengthen social workers’ decision-making capacity and ability at intake, initial and full assessments, intervention, review and case closure:

- a) Re-visit the current intake structure, design and practices. Build stronger expectations and guidelines for pro-active information gathering, conversations and collaboration at all key decision points, including direct engagement with children and young people, whānau and caregivers, as well as with health, education and other relevant agencies.

Recommendation 3 – Interagency working

Build Child, Youth and Family’s standard practices and culture around pro-active engagement with other agencies at all key decision points from referral to closure. This includes:

- a) stronger expectations at frontline and national levels to work with other agencies, professionals and organisations, share information, plan and deliver connected support for children and young people
- b) leading and collaborating to develop national interagency care and protection policies, procedures and standards that define how agencies will work together and share information (with clarity on legal aspects of information sharing)
- c) enhanced staff learning and development in collaborative working.

Recommendation 4 – Working with mokopuna Māori

Ensure that Child, Youth and Family’s culturally-based practice and strategic frameworks include:

- a) policies, procedures and systems to support staff and develop practitioner and manager capability in culturally responsive practice
- b) recognition of the time and expertise required for culturally responsive practice
- c) partnerships with iwi, Māori social service providers and communities.
- d) culturally responsive governance arrangements.

Recommendation 5 – Social work practice

Social workers need to be able to focus on the activities that make the most difference to vulnerable children and young people:

- a) Develop a single set of practice standards and priorities focused on quality social work and reinforced by a quality assurance framework and organisational leadership. Particular emphasis should be given to direct contact with children and families, supervision, interagency work and consultation.
- b) Develop and test specialised social work services that operate alongside other agencies to:
 - meet the unique needs of particular groups (for example, children in care, disabled children)
 - strengthen specialised approaches (for example, planned and systematic support, urgent and demand-driven response).
- c) Identify efficiencies in case related documentation and administration, including IT systems, to reduce duplicated or unnecessary effort and time.
- d) Clarify the role and use of support or administrative staff to ensure their skills are used effectively to free up social workers for time with children and young people, and other priority activities.

Recommendation 6 – Cases and caseloads

Define and actively manage caseload volumes:

- a) Re-set the measure for care and protection caseload to account for:
 - the number of children being actively worked with
 - the nature and complexity of the work, including cultural needs
 - practical considerations such as remoteness, travelling times etc.
- b) Develop guidelines around co-working and cover arrangements and take these into account when measuring caseload.
- c) Create organisational policy, standards and guidelines on manageable and appropriate caseloads alongside data and management systems to support, implement, monitor and review them.
- d) As a priority, assess social workers' caseloads and safely reduce those that are unreasonably high.

Recommendation 7 – Social worker resource allocation

- a) Increase the number of front line care and protection social workers in line with current needs, achievable demand management and the delivery of quality social work standards.
- b) Develop a new model for systematically monitoring, reviewing and then projecting the number of social workers Child, Youth and Family will need over time based on patterns of demand, volumes and complexity, procedural requirements, and local factors such as geography.
- c) Review the national distribution of social work capacity in line with the new model.

- d) Ensure all new policy and practice standards for social workers include an evaluation of the resources and capacity to deliver the changes.

Recommendation 8 – Supervision and supervisors

Strengthen quality social work practice in Child, Youth and Family by addressing the barriers to effective and consistent professional supervision:

- a) Review and clarify the purpose and function of supervision for Child, Youth and Family including clear aims, standards and expectations for supervision.
- b) Invest in and support supervisors to ensure they are actively and effectively managing the quality of social work practice. Specific action should focus on:
- clearly defining the skill set and standards needed in a supervisor role
 - role clarity and accountabilities for supervisors, site managers and practice leaders, ensuring supervisors focus on supporting practice rather than delivering it
 - effective succession planning and recruitment processes into supervisor roles
 - professional development and quality assurance to build supervisor performance.

Recommendation 9 – Management, leadership and organisational culture

- a) As an organisation, define the leadership behaviour and organisational culture that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice in line with Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision.
- b) At all levels, strengthen managers' capability and accountability for:
- leadership behaviour that supports quality, outcomes-focused social work practice
 - managing change in practice and policy in relation to workload
 - effectively using data and analysis to drive strategic planning and decisions
 - making strategic decisions and escalating risks about workloads and resources before they become unmanageable for social workers, teams or sites.
- c) Re-balance key organisational drivers including:
- key performance indicators – balance the current emphasis on quantitative targets with a greater focus on measures of outcome and quality
 - organisational risk management – balance the current emphasis on immediate case related and operational risks with more focus on strategic and capacity/capability risks.
- d) Create a flexible and responsive pool of external social workers and support workers to cover for those absent through significant illness, training periods or secondments.

Recommendation 10 – Information and data

- a) Improve the integration, accessibility and reliability of information available to managers to support strategic and operational decision making.
- b) Ensure information is provided in a way that enables users to understand the meaning and implications of the data, and changes or patterns over time.
- c) Increase Child, Youth and Family's current capability and capacity around data and information analysis at all levels.

Recommendation 11 – Workforce development

- a) Refresh Child, Youth and Family's strategy for recruiting, retaining and developing a quality, skilled and committed workforce, including succession planning, performance management, professional knowledge development and flexible working arrangements.

- b) Work closely with universities and social work educators and the Social Work Registration Board to promote standards of social work education, knowledge and training that equip staff for the reality and complexity of care and protection.
- c) Focus staff and leadership development on the key goals in Child, Youth and Family's strategic vision – namely, quality social work practice, responsiveness to Māori cultural needs, children's participation, interagency partnerships and leadership.

Recommendation 12 – Implementation

The Chief Executive of the Ministry of Social Development should oversee a Ministry-wide action plan, led by the Deputy Chief Executive Child, Youth and Family, and based on recommendations from this review:

- a) The review's diverse and inter-connected recommendations need to be integrated into a single, co-ordinated, holistic change management plan that dovetails with other strategic work within Child, Youth and Family and across the Ministry, including the Children's Action Plan, Investing in Services for Outcomes, Simplification, the Data Analysis Hub and the Four Year Investment Strategy.
- b) The Children's Commissioner and Expert Advisory Panel should be invited to monitor and review progress on the plan and the impact it has on quality social work practice.
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- d) To support the scope of change recommended, Child, Youth and Family should re-design its operating model to align with contemporary needs.

19 Appendices

Appendix 1: Detailed areas of inquiry

Detailed areas of inquiry	
<i>Understanding our core business</i>	1. Are we clear as an organisation about our core business (that is, the cases we 'should' be working with based on the application of child protection thresholds)?
	2. Based on our definition of our core business, are we currently working with the right cases (that is, applying appropriate child protection thresholds at intake, assessment, intervention and when closing a case)?
<i>Understanding how we define 'case'</i>	3. How should we define a case? Do our current systems and processes support this definition?
	4. How are we currently defining a case in practice and in our existing reports and systems, and how does this align with (3.) above?
<i>Understanding casework</i>	5. Are we clear as an organisation about our relative priorities in service delivery/social work practice (that is, what are the tasks we 'must do', how do they relate to quality social work, and when we are too busy what should we stop doing first)?
	6. What is the required level of work within different types of cases?
	7. What are social workers currently spending their time on when undertaking casework, and how does this align with (5.) and (6.) above?
	8. What are social worker's perceptions about how they are spending their time, and how does this compare with the findings of the activity study? What are the factors driving these perceptions?
	9. How are other site roles being used to support social work practice? Is this appropriate? Are we making the most efficient and effective use of our support functions?
<i>Understanding caseloads</i>	10. What is the actual volume, type and complexity of cases currently being managed?
	11. Are our current caseload reports giving us a true and accurate picture of social work caseloads?

Detailed areas of inquiry	
	12. What is an appropriate 'caseload' for an individual social worker (that is, a range based on levels of experience, capability etc.)?
	13. How do our current social worker caseloads compare with (12.) above?
	14. What are social worker perceptions of their caseloads, and how do these compare with their actual caseloads? What are the factors driving these perceptions?
<i>Understanding workloads</i>	15. What other work or activities not related to casework have an impact on social worker time? What factors influence this?
	16. What is the total amount of casework time available per social worker per week?
<i>Understanding support systems and processes</i>	17. How effectively are we using CYRAS as a case recording tool?
	18. How do we currently allocate our frontline social work resource at national, regional, operations area and site levels?
	19. Does our current allocation model effectively support us to seek additional resourcing or to make defensible and transparent trade-offs in service delivery when volumes exceed capacity?
	20. Do we have the right policies, procedures, systems and tools to enable us to oversee, manage and equitably allocate our funded level of resource at national, regional, operations area and site levels?
	21. How effective are our management and supervision functions in managing frontline staff workloads?

Appendix 2: Detailed methodology

To successfully address the scope of this review to the level of breadth and depth required, a multi-systemic, integrated and holistic approach was taken to understanding social worker caseloads, casework and workloads in Child, Youth and Family. This involved a mixed methodology including both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

An overview of the review methodology is provided in Chapter 5 of this report. The following section provides a more detailed explanation of the approaches applied.

A wide range of stakeholders was engaged in the review to support the reliability and validity of findings, and to build a shared understanding of and ownership in the conclusions and plans for improvement and change.

Analysing policy, law, organisational evaluations and performance reports

Informing all of the work was knowledge and information available from pre-existing sources including:

- national and international social work literature and research
- national policy, legislation and practice guidance
- performance data from within Child, Youth and Family
- research previously undertaken within Child, Youth and Family and by the PSA in relation to workload management.

Gathering data to understand Child, Youth and Family's core business

Overview

To understand how social workers and supervisors were making decisions about which cases met a level of concern that warranted Child, Youth and Family's involvement, decisions were reviewed at five key threshold decision-making points:

1. National Contact Centre, initial assessment and decision making at the point of receiving a concern.
2. At the site where the concern had been passed from the National Contact Centre, and a further initial assessment and decision was made about what further action if any was required.
3. At the site, following an initial safety assessment, the decision about whether any further action was required.
4. At the site, after a child and family assessment (CFA) or an investigation had been completed, the decision as to whether any further action was required.
5. At the site, after work had been completed with a child or young person, the decision to close the intervention.

A working definition was developed for Child, Youth and Family's core business and thresholds in care and protection social work. This provided a framework to help the review team consider the reasonableness or appropriateness of the decisions being made. The working definition was informed by legislation, policy and practice guidance and approved as a working definition by the Executive Committee within Child, Youth and Family before it was applied.

Following this review, an analysis of the current decision-making matrix tool and Child, Youth and Family's policy and practice guidance on defining core business was completed to add to the overall analysis of patterns of referral and intake behaviour.

The review team was comprised of a workstream lead, who was a core member of the project team, supported by five staff seconded for the length of this piece of fieldwork; three were current social work practitioners and two were quality assurance staff (one from the National Contact Centre and one from National Office). Two of the current social work practitioners were also PSA national delegates.

The team reviewed 293 concerns in real time that were passed to the National Contact Centre or directly to the site by either a phone or paper referral. Decisions made about concerns for children or young people in the first three categories outlined above, were followed in real time as they made their way through the Child, Youth and Family process. This allowed interviews with decision makers to be informed by the current circumstances surrounding that particular concern. Unique cases were sampled for the latter two decisions, but they were sampled from cases where that decision had been made within the last two weeks, again to ensure the currency of the information.

The figure on the following page summarises the numbers of cases reviewed and the interviews conducted at each decision-making point. The reviewers applied a standardised set of questions at each stage, which offered clear guidance to support their application.

Sampling

The sampling methodology and target sample sizes were based on the outcomes of each decision-making point. For example, intake decisions had five outcome decisions that were of interest (response in 24/48 hours, 7 days, 28 days, partnered response or no further action). For each of the outcome decisions, a sampling model was used to determine the required number of cases.

The majority of the sample cases were selected as they were received at the National Contact Centre over a six week period. The rest of the sample was based on cases that had recently been closed.

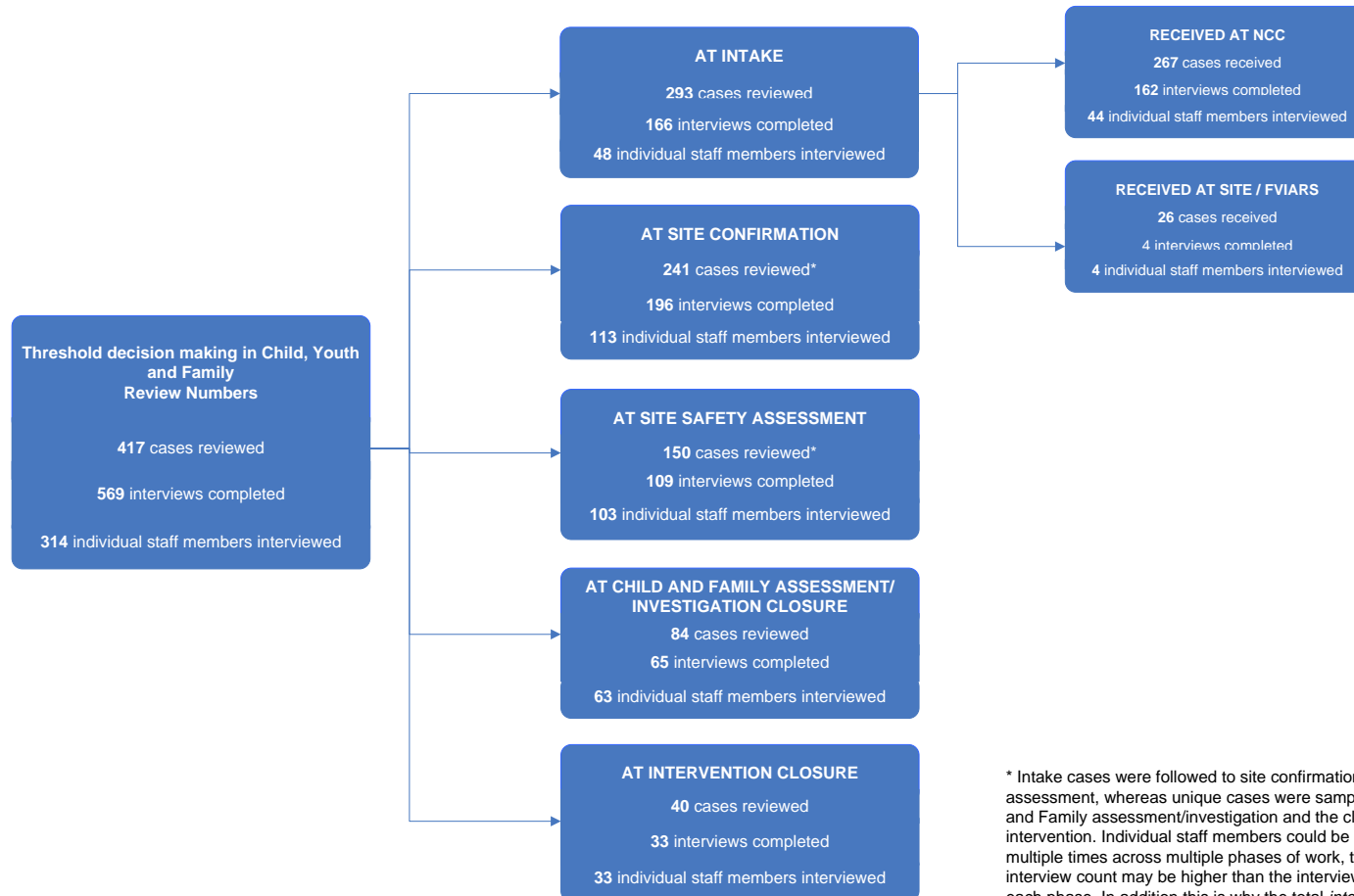
The main parameters used in the sampling methodology were:

- geographic spread
- urban/rural spread
- site size (small/large)
- for intake decisions, method of receipt (for example, phone, paper/electronic).

Moderation

A robust approach was taken to testing the questions and guidance for each stage of the process before starting the review. This ensured consistency of interpretation and understanding by the reviewers and therefore supported the inter-rater reliability. In addition, regular and frequent discussions were held between the review team while at the National Contact Centre to ensure clear interpretation of the guidance and to address any challenges as they arose. The project lead moderated a random sample of case reviews completed by each assessor at the start of the review until they were satisfied the criteria were being appropriately and consistently applied. In addition, each field worker peer reviewed a sample of their colleagues' evaluations. In total, 19 per cent of cases were moderated throughout the course of the review by both lead and peers to support the inter-rater reliability.

Review of threshold decision making in Child, Youth and Family care and protection



* Intake cases were followed to site confirmation and safety assessment, whereas unique cases were sampled for Child and Family assessment/investigation and the closure of an intervention. Individual staff members could be interviewed multiple times across multiple phases of work, therefore the interview count may be higher than the interviewee count in each phase. In addition this is why the total *interviewee* count does not reflect the sum of the phase *individual* counts.

Understanding case characteristics, casework and caseload volume: Is the organisation working in the right way?

Overview

To understand whether Child, Youth and Family were working in the right way, an in-depth look was taken at current social worker case characteristics, casework and caseloads. A sample of 300 cases was selected from 138 social worker caseloads, equating to two or three cases from each caseload. These individual cases were read in detail from the CYRAS record against a structured questionnaire. The social worker who held the case was then interviewed to gather an accurate picture of the work that had been taking place with that child, young person and family/whānau over the preceding two weeks.

The social worker was further interviewed about the rest of the cases on their caseload against a structured questionnaire. This also enabled a comparison of their overall caseload against reported caseload information.

The final part of the interview with the social worker considered wider questions related to supervision and other contextual site information, and was largely perception based.

To support the overall sample size, the review examined a further 124 cases from separate caseloads and interviewed 98 social workers about these cases.

Following detailed case reviews and individual social worker interviews, interviews were conducted with care and protection and youth justice managers, practice leaders, supervisors and support staff at 27 sites around the country. The primary purpose of these interviews was to ascertain perceptions about caseload volumes and case complexity. The interviews with managers also undertook a review of organisational data on the caseloads of each social worker at the site to investigate the current employment status of staff members recorded in this report and their role.

The approach taken to reviewing CYRAS cases and interviewing associated workers is summarised in the diagram on the following page.

The review team comprised of a workstream lead, who was a core member of the project team, supported by seven staff seconded for the length of this piece of fieldwork; five were current site based practitioners including two senior practitioners, two supervisors and a practice leader, and two were National Office staff members who were social work qualified. One of the current senior practitioners was also a PSA national delegate.

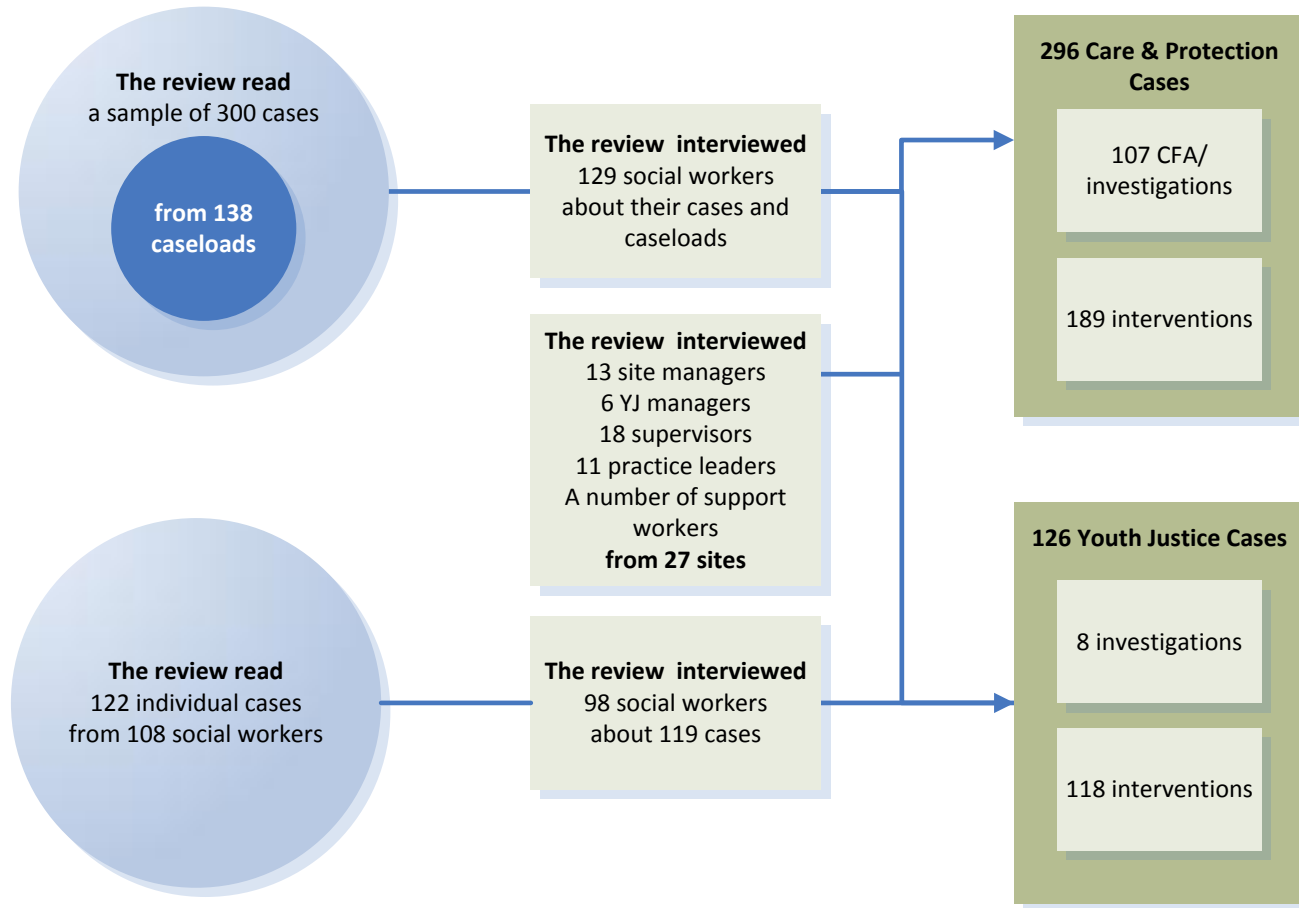
Review of cases, casework and caseloads in Child, Youth and Family

Summary of Approach

Reviewed 422 cases in CYRAS

Interviewed 275+ staff

296 C&P and 126 YJ



Sampling

The sampling methodology was developed to ensure a sufficient volume of information was collected at the following levels:

- case (CYRAS review)
- caseload/social worker
- site (interviews with site staff).

The main parameters used to drive the sampling methodology were:

- geographic spread
- urban/rural spread
- site size (small/large).

Moderation

A robust approach was taken to testing the questions and guidance for each stage of the process before starting the review. This ensured consistency of interpretation and understanding by the reviewers and therefore supported the inter-rater reliability. In addition, regular and frequent discussions were held between the review team to ensure clear interpretation of the guidance and to address any challenges as they arose. The project lead moderated a random sample of case reviews completed by each assessor at the start of the review until satisfied the criteria were being appropriately and consistently applied. Further cases were moderated throughout the course of the review to support the inter-rater reliability; a total of 11 per cent of the completed sample.

Understanding social work activity and total workload

To understand how social workers were actually spending their time across all of their daily tasks, it was essential to capture this in real time. An activity study was designed using the Ministry of Social Development's Time Allocation System (TAS), which is a self-report, desktop IT tool set up to record and help analyse work time information on a minute by minute, daily basis.

The system captured a full range of activities relevant to all staff within a site. This included travel, documentation time, face-to-face time with children and families, meetings and consultations, all of which were key elements important to understanding the work of sites and social workers' time in particular. Non-case related activities were also included such as staff meetings, administration, leave and training.

A total of 30 sites were selected from across the country that reflected a range of variables including size and geographical location. Eight of these sites undertook the study for one month between 29 October and 30 November 2013. The other 21 sites completed the activity study for one complete week during a 3-week period. All the staff members within the sites, regardless of role, were asked to participate in the study to understand the ways in which other roles contribute to the tasks of social workers.

A total of 660 staff members were involved in completing the activity study (470 from care and protection and 190 from youth justice services).

Understanding staff perceptions of casework, caseloads and workloads

To ensure all Child, Youth and Family's staff had the opportunity to provide input to the review, three short online surveys were conducted to gather information about staff and manager perceptions of social worker workloads. The surveys were developed and administered by the Ministry of Social Development's Knowledge and Insight group, using their expertise in this field. Each survey was developed to reflect a different staff group:

- case holders
- managers
- support staff.

All staff groups were sent a survey invitation on Tuesday 15 October 2013. A reminder was sent on Monday 21 October and the survey closed at the end of Wednesday 23 October.

Case holders

The survey was sent to 1,368 staff members with the following job titles:

- Co-ordinator – Care and Protection
- Co-ordinator – Youth Justice
- Differential Response Co-ordinator
- Hospital Liaison
- Senior Practitioner
- Social Worker
- Social Worker – Care and Protection
- Social Worker – Caregiver
- Social Worker – Youth Justice
- Supervisor
- Supervisor Social Worker
- Supervisor Social Worker – Youth Justice.

A total of 722 case holders responded to the survey, giving a 53 per cent participation rate.

Managers

The manager survey was sent to 83 staff members with the following job titles:

- Care Services Manager
- Site Manager
- Youth Justice Manager.

A total of 49 managerial staff responded to the survey, giving a 60 per cent participation rate.

Support staff

The survey was sent to 354 support staff with the following job titles:

- Administration Support
- Care Worker
- HCN Specialist
- Personal Assistant
- Practice Leader
- Project Manager
- Receptionist

- Resource Assistant Youth Justice
- Senior Advisor Regional Operations
- Senior Care Worker
- Senior Searcher
- Social Work Resource Assistant.

A total of 121 support staff responded to the survey, giving a 34 per cent participation rate.

Children, young people and family and whānau views

Information was gathered from a range of sources to inform the review of the views of children, young people and their family and whānau about how social workers should and do spend their time. This included information gathered from previous Child, Youth and Family forums, reports from the Office of the Children's Commissioner and international social work literature.

Consideration of cross-agency factors and views of interagency partners

Interviews were held with 15 Care and Protection Resource Panels to ascertain views of Child, Youth and Family's core business and key factors underpinning decisions to refer to Child, Youth and Family. Care and Protection Resource Panels are comprised of a range of representatives from groups, organisations and agencies concerned with care and protection and are designed to bring a range of perspectives to care and protection decisions. The interviews used a framework developed for the purpose of the review which provided descriptors indicating increasing care and protection concerns from a child or young person, carer or environmental perspective. A number of non-government organisations and one Children's Care team were also interviewed.

A workshop was held with representatives from a range of agencies who work closely with Child, Youth and Family to evaluate the data found in the review and to draw out key findings and conclusions.

Effectiveness of systems and processes to support Child, Youth and Family's work

To understand the effectiveness of the organisational systems and processes that support effective social work practice, the review team worked with subject matter experts from within Child, Youth and Family.

It reviewed the accuracy, currency and effectiveness of internal management information and data available to managers to support strategic oversight. It also considered current approaches to resource allocation.

In addition to a detailed analysis of existing systems, interviews were conducted with all regional directors, operations managers and a selection of site managers to gather feedback on organisational systems, leadership and culture that had an impact on effective workload and resource management.

Data analysis

A range of approaches was taken to analysing the data, depending on the method of data gathering used.

For qualitative information gathered through interviews, the review brought together themes and coded the different areas identified. In broad terms, a grounded theory approach was used to make sense of the vast range of qualitative data that was generated.

For the large volume of quantitative data, whether it was gathered from reviewer evaluation and entry, answer response options in interviews or the activity study, simple counts, table analyses, basic summary statistics and graphs were used to gain a summary view and to make sense of the data.

The initial focus of the analysis was generally guided by the research questions outlined in [Appendix 1](#). Subsequent analyses were conducted on an ad hoc basis depending on where the line of thought that the exploratory data analysis was guiding the review team. In other cases new variables were created by the grouping of two or more variables, or more complex data transformations were warranted with variables being combined to create new summary variables.

External review

An Independent Expert Advisory Panel was formed to oversee the review and to comment on methodology, findings and recommendations. The panel represented a mix of both operational and academic expertise as well as both national (New Zealand) and international expertise. The panel comprised of:

- Dr Nicola Atwool (Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Otago, New Zealand)
- Mike Munnely (General Manager Children and Family Services, Barnardos, New Zealand)
- John Fluke (Scholar in Residence at the Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, Colorado, US)
- Nigel Richardson (Director of Children's Services, Leeds City Council, UK).

They were actively involved throughout the process and will continue to provide support and critical oversight during the implementation of recommendations.

Telling the story

Once the data had been gathered and an initial analysis of the raw results had been completed, five workshops were held with a range of senior managers, PSA representatives, some members of the external review panel and the Office of the Children's Commissioner. The workshops focused on the following areas:

- Child, Youth and Family's core business
- Cases and caseloads
- Casework and workloads
- Support systems and processes
- Final overview and recommendations.

The purpose of these workshops was to ensure there was a shared ownership and understanding of the story behind the data that had been gathered.

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