

Question on Notice
No. 713
Asked on 10 May 2006

MR HORAN MP, asked the Minister for Child Safety (MR REYNOLDS)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the workload of child safety officers-

As at 14 February, what is the average number of children per caseworker, by area office (reported separately)?

ANSWER:

I thank the member for his question. I am pleased to report that the wide-ranging reforms we have undertaken have shown significant results with statewide caseloads down from 32 at the time of the CMC inquiry to 19 as at 14 February.

The Department of Child Safety is actively working to drive down workloads and there is a range of strategies in place at Zonal Office and Child Safety Service Centres (CSSC) to manage the individual caseloads of staff.

The Structured Decision Making (SDM) system is a significant departmental initiative which commenced implementation on 31 October 2005, and will ensure available resources are targeted at the most vulnerable, high risk clients. All professional staff have received induction training in the use of SDM. Statewide strategies for the support of SDM implementation have been developed to build and sustain the capacity and skill base within the department. The employment of seven zonally based SDM training and support officers is a key element to these support strategies.

The development of the Child Safety Practice Manual and the provision of training to support its staged release will also assist Child Safety Officers to undertake their work in a more consistent, efficient and effective manner.

It is important to note that the data provided on caseloads is a 'point in time' analysis and the use of the number of cases allocated to an officer as an indicator of workload must be considered with care.

Workload allocation needs to take into account the complexity of individual cases. Simple case numbers do not reflect the workload of individual staff. Case complexity can be influenced by a range of factors, such as the nature and extent of the child's needs, a parent's willingness to acknowledge the harm a child has endured, the ability and willingness of the child's family to work towards addressing the child protection concerns, the size and complexity of the child's extended family and the immediate availability of therapeutic services to meet the child's needs.

The Government is committed to ensuring positive outcomes for at risk children and will continue to closely monitor workload demands on the child protection system. In determining the number of children per caseworker by CSSC, it has been calculated that, as at 28 February 2006, on average, 48% of the funded child protection officers in each CSSC are case managing children on child protection orders. The remaining staff are deployed in responding to notifications, working intensively with high risk families to keep children out of the statutory system and supporting foster carers.

Child Safety Service Centre Managers must manage their staffing allocations appropriately to meet community demands for child safety services and operational imperatives, such as the completion of investigations and assessments where a 24 hour response is required to ensure a child's immediate safety. Child Safety Officer allocation to case management functions will therefore vary on a day-to-day basis depending on operational imperatives.

We are particularly conscious, that although much lower than before the CMC inquiry, the Ipswich and Western Zone and the Logan and Brisbane West Zone are still carrying caseloads which are in excess of where we would like them to be. As the Member will no doubt be aware we have recently announced another massive increase in resources for the Department of Child Safety in the 2006/07 budget. We will be targeting those resources, including increased staff towards those offices who are most in need and I would expect to see caseloads levelling out across the zones as the effect of this large injection of funds flows through.

Zones	Child Safety Service Centres	Caseload allocation per CSO
Brisbane North and Sunshine Coast	Caboolture	22
	Chermside	18
	Fortitude Valley	17
	Mitchelton	
	Gympie	17
	Pine Rivers	12
	Redcliffe	17
	South Burnett	28
	Sunshine Coast North	17
	Sunshine Coast South	
	Zonal Caseload	18
Brisbane South and Gold Coast	Beenleigh	15
	Gold Coast North	16
	Gold Coast South	
	Gold Coast West	
	Mt Gravatt	14
	Redlands	12
	Stones Corner	14
	Wynnum	18
	Zonal Caseload	15
Central	Bundaberg	19
	Emerald (Longreach)	22
	Gladstone	20
	Mackay (Bowen)	22
	Maryborough	16
	Rockhampton South	19
	Rockhampton North	
	Zonal Caseload	19
Far Northern	Atherton	21
	Cairns North	14
	Cairns South	
	Cape Torres	23
	Innisfail	20
	Zonal Caseload	18
Ipswich and Western	Goodna	19
	Ipswich North	29
	Ipswich South	
	Roma (Charleville)	29
	Toowoomba North	30
	Toowoomba South	
	Zonal Caseload	28
Logan and Brisbane West	Browns Plains North	26
	Browns Plains South	
	Inala	29
	Woodridge	19
	Logan Central	
	Loganlea	

	Zonal Caseload	23
Northern	Mt Isa	12
	Townsville North	19
	Townsville South	
	Thuringowa	20
	Zonal Caseload	17
Statewide Caseload		19