

21 March 2016**Agenda Item: 9**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT OFFICERS – PILOT EXTENSION

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to approve the extension of the Social Work Support Officer pilot until 31 March 2017, and note the £300,000 of funding requested from the Council's contingency budget.

Information and advice

2. The recruitment and retention of qualified Child Protection social workers and team managers is a national issue, resulting in Councils across the UK spending millions on high cost agency staff. In the last five years, agency spend has increased in Nottinghamshire's Children's Social Care by 22%, with the majority of this spend in the frontline child protection teams. In addition to the financial cost, high numbers of agency staff creates instability within teams and means that vulnerable young people and families may have many changes of social worker.
3. The Council has undertaken a number of initiatives to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, including the Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) pilot, which was introduced in spring 2015 to evaluate the deployment of a new role within front-line social work teams. The pilot was based on the 'Reclaiming Social Work' model of child protection, which was successfully pioneered in Hackney and praised in the Munro Report¹.
4. The SWSO pilot aimed to free up social work capacity and was based on the following success criteria:
 - a) social workers will be able to spend more time with the children and families they are supporting
 - b) improved outcomes for children
 - c) improved morale of social workers, which will improve retention rates and create a more stable workforce
 - d) improved throughput of social work cases
 - e) reduced spend on agency social workers.
5. The model has been running for approximately one year in four social care teams: Bassetlaw District Child Protection Team (DCPT), the Looked After Children (LAC)

¹ The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A Child –Centred System, May 2011.

team, Children's Disability Service (CDS) frontline social work team and Broxtowe & Rushcliffe DCPTs.

Progress to Date

6. The SWSO pilot has evidenced progress towards four of the five success criteria, as summarised below, however, it is too early to say whether it has contributed to a reduction in agency spend:
 - a) the consensus from social workers is that their time spent on administrative tasks has reduced by between 10-20% on average, which has enabled them to spend more time on report writing and case recording
 - b) the SWSO role has improved workload management and the quantity of work completed within the required timescales
 - c) the majority of social workers feel that they have more time for direct work with families
 - d) social workers have reported a better work/life balance
 - e) positive and supportive comments have been received from partners and other professionals
 - f) staff morale has improved, with 72% of social workers in the pilot describing themselves as 'happy' in the recent workforce health check, compared to 36% in the non-pilot teams
 - g) staff turnover has reduced by 41% in the pilot teams, compared to a 142% increase in the non-pilot teams. Additionally, over this period, 44% of the leavers in the pilot teams moved internally within the organisation, compared to only 19% in the non-pilot teams, who had 81% external leavers
 - h) sickness absence has reduced by 33% in the pilot teams, compared to a 32% increase in the non-pilot teams
 - i) the proportion of child protection cases open for over 12 months has reduced from 21% at 31 March 2015 to 13% at 31 December 2015. Conversely, in the non-pilot teams, the proportion of child protection cases open for over 12 months has increased from 14% at 31 March 2015 to 17% at 31 December 2015.

Proposed Extension

7. It is proposed that the SWSO model is continued in the current pilot teams from 1 April 2016, initially for a further 12 months to allow for further monitoring and evaluation. During this time, the pilot will also be rolled out in a phased approach to the other four DCPTs. Phase 1 is planned from 1 April 2016 and will include Mansfield and Ashfield DCPTs. Phase 2 is planned within 12 months and will include Newark and Gedling DCPTs.
8. The proposed model from 1 April 2016 is detailed in **Table 1**. There are currently 19 full-time equivalent (FTE) SWSO posts and two FTE Senior SWSOs. The expansion would require a net increase of two FTE SWSO posts, as some of the existing posts will be reallocated to Ashfield and Mansfield DCPTs.

Table 1

Team	Number of SWSOs (FTE)
Current Pilot Teams	
Children's Disability Service Fieldwork	3
DCPT Bassetlaw	4
DCPT Broxtowe, Rushcliffe	3
Looked After Children	5
Phase 1 Extension	
DCPT Ashfield	3
DCPT Mansfield	3
Line Management	
Senior SWSOs	2

Other Options Considered

9. The SWSO pilot could cease on 31 March 2016, although some staff would be subject to the relevant notice periods. However, the pilot has demonstrated many positive outcomes and is expected to improve recruitment and retention of social workers in Nottinghamshire. Additionally, if the SWSO role was removed, a period of reduced throughput would be expected as working practices would need to adjust. Staff morale would also be negatively impacted.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

10. The SWSO pilot has demonstrated many positive outcomes as detailed in **paragraph 6**. Therefore, an extension of the pilot is recommended, to further monitor its impact on agency spend and the recruitment and retention of Social Work staff.

Statutory and Policy Implications

11. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

12. The projected cost of a 12 month extension to the SWSO pilot is £575,000.
13. Although this is an invest to save initiative, the SWSO pilot will not be cost neutral by 31 March 2017. A contribution of £300,000 from the Council's contingency budget is therefore requested. This will be considered by Finance and Property Committee on 21 March 2016.
14. If the pilot does not deliver the anticipated invest to save savings, this may result in an overspend on the Children's Social Care budget, which will be reported as part of the monthly budget monitoring process.

15. If the SWSO role was extended beyond 12 months, it is anticipated that it could contribute to a further reduction in agency spend, although it may still not be cost neutral. Additionally, over time, there may be the potential to reduce the number of Social Worker posts, as the skills mix of the workforce changes.
16. The effectiveness of this investment will be monitored through a range of measures, including the monthly budget monitoring. If monitoring of the SWSO pilot indicates that progress is not being made to reduce spend on agency staff, the pilot will need to be re-evaluated and potentially cease.

HR Implications (BC 25.2.16)

17. Staff currently in SWSO roles will be offered an extension to their temporary contract in line with the Council's procedure regarding fixed term contracts.

Implications for Service Users

18. The SWSO role provides increased support for Social Workers and positively impacts on the service provided to children and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- 1) the Social Work Support Officer pilot is extended until 31 March 2017.
- 2) Committee notes the £300,000 of funding requested from the Council's contingency budget, which is subject to approval by the Finance and Property Committee.

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Constitutional Comments (SMG 02/03/16)

19. The Committee has the responsibility for approval of departmental staffing structures as required. The proposals in this report fall within the remit of this Committee.
20. The Employment Procedure Rules provide that the report to Committee include the required advice and HR comments and that the recognised trade unions be consulted on all proposed changes to staffing structures (and any views given should be fully considered prior to a decision being made).

Financial Comments (SS 04/03/16)

21. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraphs 12 – 16 above.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Children's Social Care Transformation Programme – Social Work Support Officer Pilot update – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 16 November 2015.

[http://ws43-](http://ws43-0029.nottscc.gov.uk/dmsadmin/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/355/Committee/482/Default.aspx)

[0029.nottscc.gov.uk/dmsadmin/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/355/Committee/482/Default.aspx](http://ws43-0029.nottscc.gov.uk/dmsadmin/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/355/Committee/482/Default.aspx)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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