

23 May 2016**Agenda Item: 6**

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

COURT TEAM SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT OFFICERS

Purpose of the report

1. To seek approval to extend the Social Work Support Officer pilot to include 2 full-time equivalent (fte) Social Work Support Officer posts (Grade 4) within the Court Team for a period of 12 months.

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 and Court 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 above success criteria as summarised below:
 - a) social workers spend less time on administrative tasks
 - b) social workers are able to undertake more direct work with the children and families they are supporting
 - c) work / life balance has improved
 - d) sickness absence rates have reduced
 - e) staff turnover rates have reduced
 - f) staff morale has improved.
7. There is no substantive evidence to show that the pilot has positively impacted on agency spend; however, there has been a reduction in two of the pilot teams, with one team remaining the same. However, the reduction in agency spend is expected to take effect over a longer period of time and needs to be further scrutinised.

Proposed Extension

8. It is proposed that the SWSO model is extended to include the Court Team initially for 12 months. This will be alongside the previously agreed roll out to the other District Child Protection Teams, as approved by the Children and Young People's Committee on 21 March 2016.
9. The expansion would require an increase of 2 fte SWSO posts (Grade 4), and would not affect the number of senior SWSOs.

Other Options Considered

10. Not extending the SWSO pilot would place the Court Team at a high disadvantage in terms of improvements to practice and the recruitment and retention of social workers in Nottinghamshire. Staff morale would also be negatively impacted.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. The SWSO pilot has demonstrated many positive outcomes as detailed in **paragraph 6**. Therefore, an extension of the pilot is recommended to include the Court Team and improve practice and potentially impact on agency spend and the recruitment and retention of social work staff.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. 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

13. The projected cost of two Social Work Support Officers to the Court Team is £50,000.
14. This will be funded from a vacant post in the Throughcare Service staffing budget, £42,000, and the balance from grant monies.
15. If the SWSO role was extended beyond 12 months, it is anticipated that it could contribute to a further reduction in agency spend. 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 on a quarterly basis. 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.

Human Resources Implications

17. Recruitment to the new posts will be in accordance with the Authority's recruitment and selection policy.

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

- 1) That the Social Work Support Officer pilot is extended for 12 months to include 2 full-time Social Work Support Officer posts (Grade 4) within the Court Team.

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Constitutional Comments (SMG 28/04/16)

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 04/05/16)

21. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraphs 13 – 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.

Social Work Support Officers – Pilot Extension - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 21 March 2016.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0814