

18 June 2018**Agenda Item: 11****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL
WORK****SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval for a range of measures to support improvements in the quality of social work practice:
 - a) that a request from contingency referred to in **paragraph 21** is made to Finance and Major Contracts Committee.
 - b) the permanent establishment of current social work support officers and senior social work support officers posts.
 - c) an increase in the permanent establishment of social work support officers and senior social work support officer posts.
 - d) the establishment of a fixed term project team to embed new approaches to supporting improvements in social work practice including case progression.
 - e) that a progress report on implementation and impact is brought to the Committee in December 2018.

Information

2. Late in 2017, a diagnostic review of Children's Services was undertaken by Newton Europe. The review focussed on the following three areas: Safeguarding and Social Work, Looked After Children and Children with Disabilities. Newton Europe found that:
 - the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has seen a 70% increase in demand since 2015 that shows no evidence of subsiding. The diagnostic highlighted that this causes significant pressure downstream.
 - in line with the pressures in the MASH, The Assessment Teams have seen a total caseload increase of +95% since the good Ofsted inspection
 - Countywide caseload and durations have increased since 2015 with child protection plan duration having increased by 27%.
3. This increase in demand places pressure on frontline social work teams, with the resulting impact being caseloads that are too high. Average caseloads in the Council's assessment service, children with disabilities and district child protection teams are currently significantly higher than they should be. The Council's position on manageable caseloads is that:
 - <20 potential capacity to manage more

- 20-21 is manageable
- 22-26 is likely to be viewed as high
- >26 is high and must be reduced.

4. This is an indicative scale and there will be variations due to case complexities (i.e. sibling groups) and the experience of the worker, however the current caseloads in the frontline assessment and child protection teams, which are outlined in **Table 1** all exceed 20-21¹:

Table 1

Team	Total Current Caseload	FTE Social Workers	Average Caseload
Assessment	927	36	26
Children's Disability Service (CDS)	389	16	24
District Child Protection Teams (DCPTs)	2054	94	22

5. If social work caseloads are too high, this has a number of potential impacts:
- negative impact on the quality of practice
 - negative impact on staff retention
 - negative impact on staff wellbeing
 - increased duration of casework due to inability to progress tasks in a timely manner
 - potential adverse Ofsted inspection outcome.
6. If average caseloads were reduced to the manageable average of 20-21 identified above, an additional 18 FTE Social Workers would be required, at a cost of £776,000 per annum (excluding the Market Factor Supplement and assuming that all these posts could be filled with experienced and permanent staff, not with agency workers). There are also significant challenges in recruiting social workers, particularly those who are sufficiently experienced to work autonomously without additional support. 47% of social workers in the frontline teams have been qualified for 18 months or less.
7. Due to such difficulties in recruiting experienced social workers, it is proposed that an alternative approach would be to increase the number of Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) posts within frontline teams, and to establish a project team to implement a new approach to supporting case progression. It is believed that this would significantly free up social worker and team manager capacity to progress cases, improve practice and staff morale, and over a period of time, would reduce average caseloads.

Social Work Support Officers (SWSOs)

8. As Committee Members will be aware, SWSO posts were introduced as part of a pilot in 2015 to support the social workers by undertaking tasks that did not need to be undertaken by a qualified social worker. An evaluation of the impact of the posts undertaken in September 2017 found that they had saved an average of 6.5 hours per

¹ As at 13.03.2018

week per social worker, thus enabling social workers to spend more time with families and progress cases in a more timely way, as well as contributing to lower turnover and vacancies in frontline child protection and assessment social work teams. The current deployment of SWSOs in frontline child protection and assessment teams is outlined below:

Team	Number of SWSOs
Assessment North	0
Assessment South	0
Ashfield District Child Protection Team (DCPT)	3
Bassetlaw DCPT	4
Broxtowe / Rushcliffe DCPT	3
Gedling DCPT	0
Mansfield DCPT	3
Newark DCPT	0
Children's Disability Service (CDS)	3
Looked After Children	4.5
TOTAL	20.5

9. There are currently no SWSO posts in the Assessment teams or the Gedling or Newark DCPTs. Furthermore, the initial aspiration was for SWSOs to be allocated on a 1 SWSO:4 social workers basis, rather than the 1:8 basis that is currently the case. If SWSOs were allocated to all of the frontline child protection and assessment teams (Assessment, DCPTs and CDS) (current allocation is ~ 1:8), the number of SWSOs across those teams would need to increase from 16 fte SWSOs (figure excludes Looked After Children SWSOs outlined in the table above) and 2 fte Senior SWSOs to 36.5 fte SWSOs and 3 fte Senior SWSOs at an additional cost of £580,521 and £24,200 set up costs:

	Grade / Cost	Number (fte)	Vacancy Level Turnover	Cost PA (£)
SWSO x 20.5 fte**	Scale 4 £26,776	20.5	6%	548,908
Snr SWSO x 1 fte**	Scale 5 £31,613	1	6%	31,613
Annual non-staffing costs*	£0	22	-	0
TOTAL COST P.A.				580,521
Initial cost (laptop, headset etc.)*	£1100	22	-	24,200 (yr 1 only)

**includes on-costs

*assumption of office base so no need for mileage, mobile phones or 4G SIM

10. It is therefore proposed that the current SWSO posts are permanently established given the strength of the evidence in support of their impact on social work practice.
11. It is further proposed that the establishment is increased as outlined in **paragraph 9**, so that SWSOs can be deployed across all frontline teams. It is anticipated that mobilisation will commence in October 2018 therefore six months of funding will be required in this financial year (£314,461).
12. Impact of the introduction of SWSOs across the teams will be measured by a range of indicators including:
 - a) Social worker caseloads
 - b) Social work retention, as measured through turnover
 - c) Sickness absence levels
 - d) Staff morale as measured through the health check
 - e) Quality of practice, as measured through case audits.

Improving social work practice through a new approach to case progression

13. As outlined in **paragraph 2**, the Newton Europe diagnostic identified drift within child protection casework. This finding is corroborated by an external review of child and family assessments and child protection planning recently commissioned by the Service Director for Youth, Families and Social Work. Reducing drift within casework can be achieved in part by a reduction in social work caseloads, but it has also been identified that there is a need for a more structured approach to progressing cases, through the introduction of a group supervision model. The introduction of such a model will need to align with Nottinghamshire's overall approach to social work, and it is estimated this will take 18-24 months to develop and roll out across the whole service. Feedback from frontline managers obtained through the Social Care Strategy event held in March 2017 suggests that the introduction of such an approach would be welcomed by staff. The introduction of such an approach is also advocated by the evaluation of the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (July 2017).
14. The introduction of such an approach would represent a significant programme of work and as such additional capacity will be required to facilitate this. It is therefore recommended that a time limited (two year) hybrid project team is established to facilitate the change, with posts to be established both within Programmes and Projects and Service Improvement within Youth, Families and Social Work. The project team will be led by the Group Manager, Service Improvement:

Post	Grade	Number Required (fte)	Existing Available (fte)	Additional Requirement (fte)	Additional Cost p.a.
Practice Consultant	C	3	0	3	£150,642
Project Manager	D	1	0	1	£53,866
Business Change Analyst	C	1	0	1	£50,214
Programme Officer	B	2	1	1	£44,143
Business Support Assistant	4	1	0	1	£26,776

Post	Grade	Number Required (fte)	Existing Available (fte)	Additional Requirement (fte)	Additional Cost p.a.
Annual non-staffing costs (mobile SIM) £145pp					£1,015
TOTAL COST P.A.		8	1	7	£326,656
Initial cost (laptop, headset etc.)		8			£8,800

15. Furthermore, it is recognised that external capacity will be required to contribute to the development of the model, for example psychology or systemic social work capacity. Further scoping work is required to specify the discipline required, as it is critical that this aligns with the overall approach to social work in Nottinghamshire. Establishing this will be an immediate priority for the project team, working with the Principal Social Worker and representatives from social work services. It is anticipated that the project team would commence in October 2018, therefore the cost in 2018/19 would be £172,128.
16. It is considered that the introduction of a model for group supervision will facilitate improvements in social work practice which will be demonstrated through key performance indicators such as duration of child and family assessments and child in need/child protection plans, reduction in re-referrals, as well as wider measures such as social work morale and staff retention.

Other Options Considered

17. The alternative option considered in terms of reducing caseloads was to increase the social work establishment by 18, however as previously noted, experience suggests the Council would be unlikely to be able to recruit experienced social workers and so the option proposed is considered to be more achievable.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

18. The options recommended are considered to be the most cost effective way of ensuring safe caseloads and through this improved quality in terms of social work practice.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment 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

20. The cost of the current 22.5 fte SWSO posts is £0.6m and the continued funding of them will be contained within the Children and Families overall budget.

21. The cost of the additional SWSO posts in 2018/19 is £314,461 and in a full year £580,521. This cost will be met by request from contingency.
22. The cost of the project team is £172,128 for 2018/19, £326,656 for 2019/2020 and £163,328 for 2020/2021. This will be met from the Strategic Development Fund.

Human Resources Implications

23. Posts will be recruited to in line with Nottinghamshire County Council's Employment Procedures.

Implications for Service Users

24. Implementation of the proposals within this report will improve the quality of service to vulnerable children and young people in need of safeguarding.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Committee:

- 1) agrees that a request from contingency referred to in **paragraph 21** is made to Finance and Major Contracts Committee.
- 2) approves the permanent establishment of the existing 20.5 fte Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) and 2 fte Senior Social Work Support Officer (Grade 5) posts.
- 3) approves the permanent establishment of an additional 20.5 fte Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) and 1 fte Senior Social Work Support Officer (Grade 5) posts as outlined in **paragraph 9**.
- 4) approves the establishment of a two year fixed term project team to develop and implement a group supervision model aligned to the Nottinghamshire approach to social work practice, including the establishment of the additional posts as follows:
 - 3 fte Practice Consultant (Band C) posts
 - 1 fte Project Manager (Band D) post
 - 1 fte Business Change Analyst (Band C) post
 - 1 fte Programme Officer (Band B) post
 - 1 fte Business Support Assistant (Grade 4) post
- 5) receives a progress report on implementation and impact in December 2018.

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Constitutional Comments (LM 08/06/18)

25. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the contents of the report.

Financial Comments (SAS 08/06/18)

26. The financial implications of the report are contained within **paragraphs 20 – 22** above.

HR Comments (BC 07/05/18)

27. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Posts will be appointed to in line with the Authority's vacancy control and recruitment procedures.

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.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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