

Appendix E

Information describing “A Day in the Life of a Social Worker”

At the last Personnel Committee meeting held on 10th March 2016, Members requested some detail on the pressures facing social workers which may contribute to higher levels of absence due to stress and anxiety. It was considered important to recognise what can be experienced during the course of a working day for of a social worker and that this would be beneficial and assist Members to understand the level and scale of the challenges faced by social workers in both Adult and Children’s services on a daily basis.

1. Information re Child Protection Social Worker:

The following article appeared in the Nottingham Post on 7th June 2014. It describes the experience of a child protection social worker in Nottinghamshire and the text from the article can be found immediately below:

Nottingham Post 7th June 2014: “We do all we can to try to keep children at home”

Six months ago, a couple were refusing to co-operate with newly-qualified social worker Leah Ungless. The 31-year-old was working with a more experienced colleague to put their young daughter on a child protection plan, as it was thought their child's health and wellbeing could be at risk.

"They were one of my first cases and the initial relationship was difficult," she said.

"They weren't speaking to me and as soon as the child protection plan was in place, the dad made a complaint against me."

At the time both of the girl's parents were drug users, and the father was in and out of prison.

The situation led to a social care referral and the child protection plan being issued.

After regular visits to their home in Gedling borough, the couple began to trust Leah and improve their home life.

In March, their case was downgraded to a "child in need" plan – where there is no danger to the child but the family has been identified as needing extra help.

This week, the couple's case was closed on Leah's recommendation, after a dramatic turnaround in their fortunes.

The Post sat in on a review of their case by members of Nottinghamshire County Council's Gedling Child Protection Team in Arnold.

The 50-minute meeting saw Leah and the couple sit with other social workers, police, health workers and school representatives to discuss the child's progress to see if the family still needed support from social services.

The plan included measures around improving the child's health, education and home life stability.

Leah said: "It's been really positive. I think the parents are doing really well."

"The child has talked about being sad and worried her dad is going back to the 'naughty house' (prison), but now when we look at the future she is quite clear that 'daddy is going to be here with me at home'."

The father, who asked to remain anonymous, said: "I think we're in a good place at the minute. She's going to school more regularly, she's drawing and likes playing 'teachers'."

Of his attitude towards social workers now, he added: "I have no problem with social services. They are a hated profession – up there with traffic wardens – but at the end of the day they have jobs to do. There's been a good outcome and it was on us to do it."

"We know another person who was put on a care plan at the same time as us and they had their kid taken off them. It's down to you to control what happens."

After the hearing, former youth worker Leah said: "I'm really pleased for them."

"I've been seeing them every three weeks, making both announced and unannounced visits. Families can be anxious about us turning up unannounced but it's not just about checking up on them, it's also about seeing the positive side of what they are doing every day."

She added: "This decision is the best thing for the child because at the end of the day we don't want to be involved when we are not needed."

"The couple have got aspirations for her. They want everything for her that they have not had or got for themselves."

"We want to do everything that we can to try to keep children at home with their families and ensure they are safe."

Social workers in the team can work with up to 12 to 15 families at any one time.

Haley Upfold, 29, has been supporting Leah as she gains experience. A social worker since 2010, Haley is now a social work practice consultant for the team.

A psychology graduate and former mental health worker, she said: "You need to make relationships with people in order to help them change."

"The cases that stick with me are when families find it really hard for us to be involved, and we have to do a bit of work getting to know them and their child."

"From there, there can be positive outcomes."

Team manager Suzie Morris said: "This couple's case demonstrates that we have success stories."

"We can work through with families to de-escalate things and enable change. We're here to help, but unless families work with us we won't have success."

In addition to this information, the BBC and the Open University created an online, interactive resource which accompanied the BBC documentary series "Protecting Our Children" which invites people to try a day in the life of a frontline child protection social worker. You can access this information by following the link below.

[Try A Day in the Life of a Social Worker](#)

If Members would find it helpful to shadow a NCC social worker or to visit a social work team, this can be arranged through Steve Edwards for Children and Paul McKay for Adults social care.

2. Information re Adult social worker:

Social workers: “Do-gooders or doing good?” by Caroline Le Marechal BBC News, Bristol

- 6 November 2015
- From the section Bristol

“Who would want to be a social worker? Blamed and shamed by the media when things go wrong and often perceived as "do-gooders or clueless busybodies", the profession remains a mystery to many.”

The BBC spent a day with one of Bristol's 195 adult care social workers to find out more about their work, from supporting people with learning difficulties or battling addictions to helping dementia and stroke patients. Albert, not his real name, is part of a community team covering a substantial chunk of the city.

On average, he and his colleagues each have a caseload of about 20 people.

"What did you expect?" when I mention that his Mohican and piercings are not the stereotypical look of a social worker. "A man in a fading tweed jacket with corduroy patches on the sleeves? A useless, don't-have-a-clue, busybody who just wants to put you and your mum in a care home, and then forget? If I'm honest, I hope people will only think about us like that if they've been fortunate enough never to need our help and support."

According to the Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) it is an "important time" for adult social care services in England. It says there is "not enough" money to go around, and the situation is forecast to get even worse, with a £4.3bn funding gap expected by 2020.

ADASS has urged politicians to seriously consider how society can meet the "significant growth in the volume and complexity of needs faced by generations that rightly expect to lead longer more fulfilled lives".

"I get to meet people when they are vulnerable, when they've lost capacity to make decisions, when they are disorientated and lost," said Albert.

"Then I get to hear their amazing stories, and meet some incredible families, I get to be part of their lives for a brief moment and I try to help."

He explained that each client has different needs - from mental health to physical challenges, from coping with being terminally ill to trying to support your once fit and healthy loved ones as they get older.

One of Albert's clients is recovering alcoholic Simon Madeley. Albert managed to secure the funding for his rehab at Chandos House in Bristol.

Mr Madeley said he had turned to alcohol as a "quick fix" after losing his business and experiencing the breakdown of his family.

He said he had ended up in a coma and "nearly died twice" from his addiction.

Albert put him "at ease straightaway", though, and had helped him to turn his life around.

"This is when social services come into their own," he said. "They are that voice of reason. It's nice to have someone impartial, someone independent to talk to."

Albert said part of his role was to be a trusted guide for the people he helps.

He said: "Who does what? What is the law? What help can I get? How does it work? How much will it cost? What am I going to do now?"

"As a social worker we have to be able to answer all these questions, be able to find the services that can help, and understand complex and constantly adapting laws."

Another client, an elderly man with vascular dementia, now lives in a care home. Albert has to help him to manage a complicated legal process involving the end of a previous tenancy.

During the visit, Albert sits down with him and puts a pile of letters on the table. He shows him some of the post which has been delivered to his previous address.

Albert said: "To be a good social worker, we have to embrace the chaos of life, we have to understand people, respect people and be honest about what we can do to help. "

Where does the money go?

£138.7m spent in Bristol on adult social care in 2013-14, including

- £73.9m on older people, including those with mental health problems
- £43m on under-65s with mental health problems
- £13.4m on under-65s with a physical disability or sensory impairment
- £10m on under-65s with mental health problems

Source: Bristol City Council

"When life falls apart, our colleagues in the NHS will work hard to make you better, whilst we as social workers will try to ensure you are living life as independently as possible."

"We try and find a way into the world of people who live chaotic, dangerous lifestyles. We ask difficult questions when they need to be asked. We risk being unpopular to ensure the right thing happens for the people we work with."

Bristol's estimated population

432,500

- 27,999 contacted the city's social care services in 2013-14
- 11,374 made use of its services in the same year
- 6,209 had a physical disability or were frail
- 1,333 were carers

Source: Bristol City Council

He said adult care social workers do not have the "mind-blowing pressures" of child care social workers, but often "our workload is frenetic, saturated in worry and pushes us to the limits of mental endurance".

"We have to ensure the person we work with is at the centre of everything we do. We have to respect their capacity to make decisions for themselves and help them make choices in their best interests if they lack the capacity to do so independently."

"Occasionally, all we are is a little pinprick of light in a tumultuous and bleak world, sometimes we can make things a whole lot better, more often than not we relieve the pressure for a short while. "

"Are we always perfect? No. But please remember we are working with real people and their needs, emotions, their quirks, history, wishes, hopes and fears. Our working environment equates to modern jazz to the untrained ear."

"We set boundaries, protect public funds, manage care provision, meet your needs, reduce risk of offending, support your voice, ensure your rights, work for you, enable you, and genuinely try to help you and your mum."