

20 February 2017**Agenda Item: 13****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****EXTENSION OF THE SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT OFFICER PROGRAMME****Purpose of the report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval for the extension of the Social Work Support Officer programme in Children's Social Care until 31 March 2018, subject to approval of funding as part of the proposed 2017/18 budget at Full Council on 23 February 2017.

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. The challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified social work staff is not unique to Nottinghamshire, with councils nationally having spent in excess of £500m on agency social workers in the last three years.
3. In the last five years, the County Council has spent £27m on agency staff in Children's Social Care, with the majority of this spend in the frontline child protection teams. While agency numbers in Nottinghamshire are broadly in line with, or lower than, regional and statistical neighbours, spend on agency staff continues to present a significant budgetary pressure on the service.
4. The Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) programme, which was introduced in spring 2015, forms part of a wider package of recruitment and retention initiatives to reduce agency spend in Children's Social Care. Additional recruitment and retention initiatives that are underway include: the introduction of a Market Factor Supplement for social work staff in frontline child protection teams; close collaboration with local higher education institutions to support the recruitment of newly-qualified social workers; a rolling recruitment programme; ICT and technological investment to support staff mobilisation; and ongoing training and development opportunities.
5. The SWSO programme is based on the 'Reclaiming Social Work' model of child protection, which was successfully pioneered in Hackney and praised in the Munro Report¹. The role aims to free up social work capacity and is based on the following success criteria:
 - a) social workers are able to spend more time with the children and families they are supporting

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

- b) outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are improved
 - c) improved morale of social workers, resulting in improved retention rates and a more stable workforce
 - d) improved throughput of social work cases
 - e) reduced reliance on agency social workers.
6. The model has been running for approximately two years and is now operational in the following teams: Bassetlaw District Child Protection Team (DCPT), Mansfield DCPT, Ashfield DCPT, Broxtowe & Rushcliffe DCPTs, the Looked After Children (LAC) team and the Children's Disability Service (CDS). There are currently 20.5 FTE (full-time equivalent) SWSOs and 2 FTE Senior SWSOs deployed across these social work teams.
 7. Nottinghamshire's Social Work Support Officer model has received national recognition, including reference within the Local Government Association's recent publication of *Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services*². Colleagues from Northamptonshire County Council and Gloucestershire County Council have also visited Nottinghamshire to discuss the SWSO role, with a view to implementing this model within their own services.
 8. The deployment of SWSOs within social work teams presents the County Council with an opportunity, in the longer-term, to change the skill-mix within Children's Social Care and reduce the number of social worker posts over time, as capacity is freed up and throughput is increased. The Council has already implemented a skills-mix model within the Fostering Service and the Court Team³, which is proving successful in day-to-day operations.
 9. At this stage, the SWSO programme (excluding SWSOs in the Fostering Service and in the Court Service) is only funded up until 31 March 2017, as agreed at Children and Young People's Committee on 21 March 2016.
 10. It is proposed that the SWSO programme is extended until 31 March 2018, as part of the ongoing recruitment and retention activity in Children's Social Care. This would be at a projected cost of £581,398 and this funding will be included in the proposed 2017/18 budget to be considered by County Council on 23 February 2017. It is expected that these costs will contribute to a reduction in agency spend and this will be monitored as part of the wider recruitment and retention work.

Progress to Date

11. In October 2016, a survey was sent to social work staff, to better understand the impact that SWSOs are having. Key findings from the survey included:
 - a. 81% of respondents indicated that they were spending significantly less time on administrative work as a result of the SWSO role; 74% of respondents emphasised that they had more time to progress cases, with 71% indicating that they were building better relationships with children as they had more time to undertake direct work

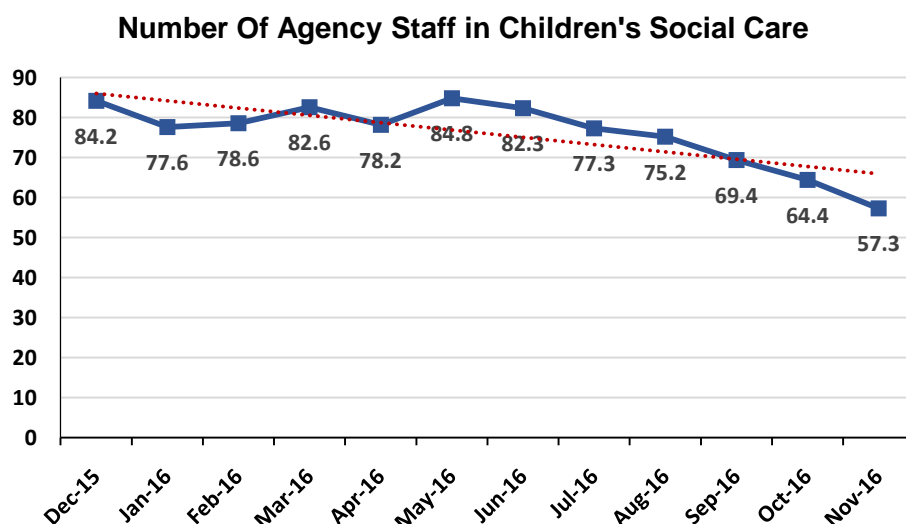
² Page 66, [*Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services*](#), Spring 2016

³ Fostering Service and Court Service SWSOs have been funded from individual service budgets

- b. Respondents also indicated that the deployment of SWSOs in their team had resulted in better team morale and provided a greater motivation to stay with the County Council.

12. The number of agency staff continues to decline. As at November 2016, there were 57.3 FTE agency staff working within the service, compared to 84.2 FTE a year ago (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



Other Options Considered

13. The SWSO programme could cease on 31 March 2017, although some staff would be subject to the relevant notice periods. However, the SWSO role has demonstrated many positive outcomes and is expected to further 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 re-adjust and this could destabilise social work teams. Staff morale would also be negatively impacted.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

14. The SWSO programme has demonstrated many positive outcomes and appears to be contributing to the reduction in agency social work staff, as detailed in **paragraphs 11 & 12**. Therefore, an extension until 31 March 2018 is recommended, as part of the wider recruitment and retention activity in Children's Social Care.

Statutory and Policy Implications

15. 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.

Human Resources Implications

16. If the extension of the SWSO programme was approved, the 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

17. 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 programme in Children's Social Care is extended until 31 March 2018, subject to approval of funding as part of the proposed 2017/18 budget at Full Council on 23 February 2017.

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Constitutional Comments (SMG 01/02/17)

18. The Committee is responsible for approval of departmental staffing structures as required. The proposals outlined in this report fall within the remit of this Committee.
19. 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 (TMR 31/01/17)

20. The financial implications are set out in paragraph 10.

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 - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 08 December 2014.

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.

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