

**8 December 2014****Agenda Item: 08**

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE PILOT**

### **Purpose of the Report**

1. This report informs the Committee of the plan to run a six-month pilot in Children's Social Care that seeks to prove the concept of a new model of social work practice which will integrate social workers and support workers effectively and measurably, based on need within localities, and thereby reduce the number of social work posts required. The report also seeks approval in principle to fund the pilot from the Strategic Development Fund in the event that it does not curb costs as anticipated.

### **Information and Advice**

#### **Social Work Practice Pilot**

2. The social work practice pilot is based on the 'Reclaiming Social Work' model of child protection successfully pioneered in Hackney and praised in the Munro Report. It has been adopted by numerous councils including Cambridgeshire County Council and one of its founders, Isabelle Trowler, is the Chief Social Worker for England.
3. It is assumed that by adopting a version of the Hackney model which is more suited to the size, demographic, and current social work practice of Nottinghamshire County Council, a model which meets the following success criteria will be achieved:
  - social workers will be able to spend more time with the children and families they are supporting
  - improved outcomes for children
  - improved morale of social workers, which will improve retention rates and create a more stable workforce
  - improved throughput of social work cases
  - reduced spend on agency social workers.
4. The Nottinghamshire pilot model will be based on a change in skills-mix in social work teams. A new role, social work support officers, will be introduced to social work teams to pick up tasks which do not require a social work qualification, thus freeing-up social worker capacity. It is anticipated that this will effect a reduction in the numbers of social workers required, specifically agency social workers, and that the resultant cost-saving will offset the cost of the social work support officer posts.

5. It is anticipated that the introduction of support for social workers will increase morale and improve retention rates. It is also assumed that demonstration of forward-thinking in social work practice, coupled with technological support via mobilisation, will improve recruitment rates.
6. It is expected that a change to social work practice will be received positively by social workers – early feedback from NCC Children’s Social Care social workers and local and national examples such as Cambridgeshire County Council reinforces this expectation.
7. The plan therefore is to run a pilot to prove the concept of changing the skills-mix of social work teams by creating a social work support officer role. The pilot is scheduled to run from February through to October 2015, with four teams running for six months each.
8. It is proposed that 19 social work support officer roles are employed for six months over and above the existing establishment, and that funding is set-aside to cover the cost of these posts in the eventuality that the pilot does not work as anticipated, and that agency social workers cannot be released.

### **Financial Rationale**

9. The cost of recruiting 19 social work support officer roles for the pilot group is **£230,328**. In order to reduce the risk of impact on the current year’s budget, the pilot start will be staggered. This will result in a cost of **£24,246** in 2014/15 and **£206,082** in 2015/16. The total cost is **£230,328**.
10. The proposed schedule for reducing agency social worker contracts is:
  - Bassetlaw District Child Protection Team (DCPT): reduce by 1 FTE in March, 1 FTE in May, 0.5 FTE in July
  - Children’s Disability Service Fieldwork: reduce by 1 FTE in April, 1 FTE in June, 0.5 FTE in August
  - Broxtowe/Rushcliffe DCPT: reduce by 1 FTE in May, 1 FTE in July, 0.5 FTE in September
  - Looked After Children Team: reduce by 1 FTE in June, 1 FTE in July, 1 FTE in August, 1 FTE in September, 0.5 FTE in October.
11. Agency social worker contracts will not be ended unless there is rationale for doing so and there are no concerns regarding adequate provision of child protection.
12. Provided that agency contracts are ended at the rate proposed, the pilot will almost be cost-neutral. If the number of agency social worker contracts does not reduce at the rate proposed it is likely that the pilot will incur costs. The total proposed agency spend reduction is **£224,160**, but it is too early to confirm this figure.
13. It is proposed that the cost for 2014/15 (£24,246) be contained within the Children and Families budget. If the 2015/16 additional spend (£206,082) cannot be covered by the release of agency staff or contained within the Children and Families budget, a bid would be made to the Strategic Development Fund.

14. The outcome of the pilot will be brought back to Committee with recommendations for a permanent model.

## **Risks**

15. There is a risk that without close supervision the social work support officer role could be used to perform inappropriate tasks within the social work teams, including business support tasks and social work tasks. It is important to ensure that the role of the social work support officer is not compromised or diluted, and that all of their resource directly contributes to increasing social worker capacity. This will be mitigated by ensuring that the job description explicitly describes the dimensions of the role and that this is fully explored and understood by all colleagues involved in the pilot.
16. There is a small risk that the pilot will not achieve the results expected. In order to mitigate this risk the proposed Nottinghamshire model is tailored to the size, demographic, and current social work practice of Nottinghamshire County Council, and does not make comprehensive changes to the way social workers practice. Using an agile, trial-and-improvement approach and with responsive and adaptive leadership, the model will be honed over the course of the six-month pilot so that it meets projected success criteria. This model also fits with the current Integrated Family Support Model project, which seeks to create locality-based support provision to children, young people and their families based on local requirements - this will further strengthen and support the proposed Nottinghamshire social work model.

## **Other Options Considered**

17. That the Reclaiming Social Work model is adopted in its entirety, without refinement. The model is based around social work units or hubs, made up of senior consultants, social workers, therapists and co-ordinators. In order to apply this model to Nottinghamshire County Council extensive changes would need to be made to team sizes, job descriptions, management structure and geographical locations. It is believed that benefit could be gained from taking a more conservative approach, and that running a pilot will confirm this hypothesis.
18. That social work practice could stay as it is; however, this would not reduce the current £5m spend on agency workers, nor would it address morale issues which are pressurising retention rates.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

19. In order that the development of social work practice can be accomplished which will potentially reduce the department overspend on agency social workers and could go on to contribute to departmental savings budgets.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), 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**

21. It is proposed that the cost for 2014/15 (£24,246) be contained within the Children and Families budget. If the 2015/16 additional spend (£206,082) cannot be covered by the release of agency staff or contained within the Children and Families budget, a bid would be made to the Strategic Development fund.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That:

- 1) the plan to run a six-month Social Work Practice Pilot in Children's Social Care be noted
- 2) a potential call on the Strategic Development Fund of £206,082 in 2015/16 be approved.

**Steve Edwards**  
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**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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### **Constitutional Comments (LM 19/11/14)**

22. The Children and Young People's Committee has delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report.

### **Financial Comments (SS 24/11/14)**

23. The financial implications are contained within the report.

### **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.

Munro review of child protection: final report - a child-centred system (2011)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system>

Reclaiming Social Work  
London Borough of Hackney Children and Young People's Services (2010)  
<http://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Eileen-Munro-Review-of-the-Hackney-Model.pdf>

**Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

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