

7<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Agenda Item: 8

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL WORK**

### **PRINCIPAL CHILD AND FAMILY SOCIAL WORKER ANNUAL REPORT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The report outlines the key priorities for 2021 for Nottinghamshire County Council's Principal Child and Family Social Worker and the actions which have been taken to meet these objectives and goals for future work.

#### **Information**

2. The Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) recommended that each local authority designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker to lead on developing professional practice and standards to ensure good outcomes for children and young people at an organisation and at a national level.
3. In 2018 the Department for Education in Working Together<sup>1</sup> determined that Principal Child and Family Social Workers have a key role in developing the practice and the practice methodology that underpins direct work with children and families and should support social workers, the local authority and partners to develop their assessment practice and decision-making skills, and the practice approach that underpins this.
4. The Local Government Association, Standards for employers of social workers in England<sup>2</sup> states that Principal Social Workers must understand and manage the organisational responsibility across all standards.

#### **Recruitment and retention**

5. Child and family social work is challenged by high turnover with the need for experienced workers outstripping supply. The Department for Education estimates that the average child and family social worker stays in the profession for seven years and will stay in a front-line child protection role for only three years.

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<sup>1</sup> [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/672212/Working-Together-to-Safeguard-Children-2018.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [The Standards for employers of social workers in England | Local Government Association](https://www.local.gov.uk/standards-for-employers-of-social-workers-in-england)

6. The most recent Department for Education Social Workforce Data indicates that there is an acute shortage of Experienced Children and Families Social Workers, there were 6,100 FTE children and family social worker vacancies on 30 September 2020, up from 6,000 at the same point in 2019<sup>3</sup> (The next annual publication will be end of February 2022). Despite national and regional challenges, Nottinghamshire County Council children's social care average vacancy and turnover rate for children and family social workers has remained lower than the national average. In February 2022 the turnover rate was 5% with 21 social work vacancies.
7. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker works closely with colleagues on a range of activities to improve the working experience and promoting recruitment and retention of social workers. This includes supporting social workers in training, newly recruited graduate social workers and social workers who are working for the department.
8. It is hoped that by increasing the number of good quality social work student placements newly qualified social workers will be encouraged to work for the Authority.
9. During the academic year 2020/21 Nottinghamshire Children's Services will have hosted a total of 54 placements for student social workers: 42 placements for students from local teaching partnership universities, and a further 12 placements for students on other training programmes (Step-up to Social Work, Open University). Although the number of student placements offered this academic year is lower than the previous year this is in line with 2018/19 which is the last year pre-pandemic.
10. In 2021, 33 of the 42 Newly Qualified Social Workers recruited had their final social work placement with the department (NB: this included 6 Step up to Social Work students).
11. In addition to supporting student social workers at local universities we also want to support existing Nottinghamshire County Council employees to gain a social work qualification and progress their career in the department.
12. In 2018 and 2019 we were able to join a local partnership (led by Nottingham City with Manchester Metropolitan University), which enabled 13 members of staff to complete a 'fast track' undergraduate degree and social work qualification, and then to move into a social worker post.
13. This programme was successful and enabled existing members of staff with aspirations for career development by getting a degree and social work qualification. Unfortunately, this option is no longer available for us as the lead local authority decided they could no longer support this programme and Manchester Metropolitan University decided not to offer this again.
14. In 2018 standards<sup>4</sup> for a three-year Social Work degree apprenticeship were agreed. Following this the Principal Child and Family Social Worker worked with colleagues at Nottingham Trent University to enable them to become an approved provider and in

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<sup>3</sup> Children's social work workforce [Children's social work workforce, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/explore-education-statistics)

<sup>4</sup> [Social worker \(integrated degree\) / Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education](#)

January 2021 our first cohort of four apprentice social workers commenced the programme.

15. Subject to final Committee approval it is proposed to have a rolling programme with five apprentice social worker posts offered each year for existing employees (permanent and temporary) offering them a route to get a degree and social work qualification. A report on this is also on the agenda of today's meeting. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will be the lead officer for recruitment to these posts and will have oversight of the programme.
16. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is the lead officer with oversight of the Council's engagement with the Step-up to Social Work programme<sup>5</sup>. This Department for Education sponsored 14-month, national fast track training programme is designed for people who already have a degree level qualification (minimum 2:1) plus experience working with children and families. Candidates are based within a local authority whilst completing their study for a post graduate diploma in social work.
17. In April 2021 cohort 6 of the Step-up programme ended with six of the seven students we hosted choosing to remain working with the Local Authority as newly qualified social workers. In January 2022, cohort 7 of the programme commenced and seven more Step-up students joined the Local Authority, who are due to complete their training in April 2023.

### **Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE)**

18. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is the designated ASYE co-ordinator and in this role has oversight of the programme.
19. The ASYE is a Department for Education sponsored, one year employer-led induction programme which develops the skills, knowledge and confidence of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs).
20. In 2021 32 Newly Qualified Social Workers completed the ASYE programme and there are currently 54 Newly Qualified Social Workers doing the programme.
21. In July 2021, Newly Qualified Social Workers completing the programme along with their line managers and mentors were invited to complete a national 360 analysis of the ASYE programme; the survey identified that every area of the programme was working well. The survey highlighted many strengths including NQSWs receiving regular reflective supervision as stated in the Local Government Association Employer Standards and that the outcomes for Newly Qualified Social Workers were quality assured to ensure they are accurate, valid, robust and sufficient.
22. Newly Qualified Social Workers, their line managers and mentors agreed that an area for development is the approach used for workload relief for Newly Qualified Social Workers participating in the ASYE programme.
23. Due to the Covid-19 public health emergency Newly Qualified social workers who completed the ASYE programme in 2021 received the whole of their ASYE training and

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<sup>5</sup> [Apply for Step Up to Social Work - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

most of their mentoring and supervision digitally and not face to face. Whilst social workers, mentors and managers have told us that they are satisfied with the provision made for them, there has also been a strong message that this cohort of newly qualified social workers did not get the experiences and opportunities to form relationships, learn from each other or learn from colleagues as their predecessors. In 2021 11 (18%) of Newly Qualified social workers (from a cohort of 62) left the department either before completing their ASYE programme or on completion of the programme which is much higher than the five who left the previous year. Exit interviews have not identified any specific patterns for leaving the job, reasons have included re-locating, wanting a job nearer to home, moving to a job in adult care, deciding to take a break and hoping to return at a later point. We have also recognised that more Newly Qualified Social Workers have needed additional time to complete their ASYE programme due to absence from work or due to needing additional support to gain skills and confidence.

24. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will be working with colleagues who design and deliver the ASYE programme to ensure that we learn from the feedback and that we continue to develop the programme. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is also leading on developing a post ASYE year of activities to try to bridge the gap from completing the ASYE programme to becoming an experienced social worker.

### **Social Work Career Progression**

25. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker oversees the children's social work career progression process, which is aligned to the Department for Education Post Qualifying Standards for Social Workers<sup>6</sup>.
26. With the support of their managers social workers who are able to demonstrate that they are working at the level of an 'experienced social worker' can attend a career progression panel and apply for progression to salary scale Band B.
27. In 2021 14 social workers attended the career progression panel and successfully demonstrated that they were working at the level of an experienced social worker. When compared with previous years we are aware that 2021 saw fewer social workers progress than in any other year (2018, 16 progressed, 2019, 19 progressed, 2020 25 progressed).
28. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has explored the reasons for the decline in numbers and is assured that there are social workers who need to apply for progression, but due to the additional pressures experienced over the last 18 months have not felt able to dedicate time to complete this. New dates for progression panels have been set and managers have been provided with information to support their social workers to apply, and it is pleasing to know that so far in 2022 eight social workers have already applied for progression.

### **National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS)**

29. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has been our lead officer for engagement with the Department for Education in the design and delivery of the National Assessment

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<sup>6</sup> [Social work post-qualifying standards: knowledge and skills statements - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/91222/social-work-post-qualifying-standards-knowledge-and-skills-statements.pdf)

and Accreditation System (NAAS) and in 2021 was an associate member of the national NAAS Standard Setting Panel.

30. The system was designed so that experienced childcare social workers and managers could demonstrate their proficiency by sitting a national accreditation assessment benchmarked against post qualifying standards for child and family practitioners and practice supervisors<sup>7</sup>. The Department for Education promoted NAAS as a vehicle for improving the quality of practice and the outcomes for vulnerable children.
31. The ambitious plan that up to 100 Nottinghamshire County Council Child Care Social Workers would complete the voluntary accreditation assessment in 2020 was disrupted by the Covid-19 public health emergency.
32. Prior to March 2020 17 of our social workers / managers had completed the NAAS. The accreditation system was then paused, only re-opening in July 2021. Between July and December 2021 18 more social workers / managers completed the accreditation until the assessment centres were again paused.
33. In January 2022 the Department for Education announced that the delivery model of assessment and accreditation will be changing and the current model, the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS), will not be restarting.
34. The Department for Education remains committed to embedding social worker assessment and accreditation and will be working with the sector to design a more sustainable model.
35. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will continue to be the lead officer engaging with the Department for Education as they design and roll out the revised assessment and accreditation delivery model.

## **Social Work England**

36. On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 Social Work England became the new professional regulator for social workers. Each year (by 30<sup>th</sup> November) all social workers must renew their registration with the professional regulator and complete a professional development portfolio.
37. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has been the single point of contact with Social Work England and ensured that everyone had the information they needed to complete their re-registration.
38. Social Work England has confirmed that the re-registration process in 2021 worked well with fewer than 70 social workers nationally across all sectors being removed from the register.
39. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will continue to be the single point of contact with Social Work England, working in partnership to ensure that our staff have the information and support they need to maintain their registration. The Principal Child and

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<sup>7</sup> [Social work post-qualifying standards: knowledge and skills statements - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90222/social-work-post-qualifying-standards-knowledge-and-skills-statements.pdf)

Family Social Worker is also going to be the link officer with Social Work England for fitness to practice investigations.

### **Social Work Health Check**

40. In December 2021 the Local Government Association invited all principal social workers to participate in their second national social work health check.<sup>8</sup>
41. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker and Adult Care Principal Social Worker completed the survey together and supported and encouraged all social workers in all teams and services in Nottinghamshire to complete the survey.
42. In February 2022 the Local Government Association provided a preliminary summary from the 2021 Nottinghamshire Children and Families Health Check which showed a 'good score/ outcome to be celebrated' against all 8 standards for employers of social workers. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will complete a detailed analysis of the full health check.

### **Implementation of a strengths-based approach**

43. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is the lead officer with oversight of Schwartz Rounds, a structured forum where all staff in all roles come together regularly to discuss the emotional and social aspects of their work<sup>9</sup>.
44. From March to July 2021, seven virtual Schwartz Rounds were arranged for colleagues in children's social care.
45. Following the positive evaluation of Schwartz Rounds it was agreed that colleagues from, adult social care would join the steering group and joint Schwartz Rounds would be held. From September to December 2021, four joint adult and children social care Schwartz Rounds were held with participants from both departments telling stories and contributing.
46. In response to specific needs there were three additional Schwartz rounds arranged for colleagues in children's social care, two for colleagues working in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub who wanted to come together and share their reflections on their work and one for children and families social workers to offer an opportunity to reflect on how they were impacted (personally and professionally) by the murders of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson.
47. In 2022 the Principal Social Worker will continue to lead the Schwartz Steering group, involve as many practitioners as possible from different teams and services, establish a regular programme of rounds (some via MS Teams and where possible some in person meetings) and where needed use the model to respond to specific needs of the workforce.
48. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is joining with peers to develop a regional community of practice, where we can share and learn from each other and maximise the impact of Schwartz Rounds for our workforce.

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<sup>8</sup> [New social work health check 2020 | Local Government Association](#)

<sup>9</sup> [About Schwartz Rounds - Point of Care Foundation](#)



49. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has been the lead officer working with the Educational Psychology Service and the social work practice development leads to design and deliver a strengths-based training programme for social workers, with more than 450 practitioners booking places to attend.
50. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker worked with colleagues in the independent chair service to design and deliver briefings for social workers prior to the introduction of new strengths-based child protection conferences and strengths-based reviews with looked after children. These workshops were attended by more than 200 people.
51. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker and a practice development lead have continued to develop and embed Group Reflective Supervision in all social work teams. Feedback suggests that this has now been adopted as business as usual for some teams, with social workers and managers participating and learning together.
52. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has been leading on the development of a set of strengths-based resources and tools for practitioners to use across the department to aid communication and engagement with children and young people.
53. In 2022 the Principal Child and Family Social Worker will continue to work with colleagues across the department to ensure that training and development opportunities continue to be provided and resources and tools are developed which support the strengths-based practice model.

### **Regional and National Principal Social Work Networks**

54. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker is the chair of the Regional Principal Social Work Network. Meetings are held every month and provide an invaluable opportunity for peers from across the region to share examples of good practice and innovation.
55. The network is currently working with the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance on Department for Education funded 'Build Back Better' projects. A series of Principal Social Worker development sessions have been booked on themes which have relevance across the East Midlands.
56. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker will continue to work with colleagues across the region to develop and improve practice.
57. In 2021 the Chief Social Worker for England, and representatives from the Department for Education, Ofsted and Social Work England have hosted monthly meetings with members of the National Principal Social Work Network to share information regarding national social work reform and agendas for improvement. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker has attended and will continue to attend and participate in these meetings and ensure that information and learning is brought back to the Local Authority.

### **Adult and Child Care Principal Social Worker joint working**

58. The Principal Child and Family Social Worker and the Adult Care Principal Social Worker work together on a number of projects to strengthen relationships and promote positive

social work practice in Nottinghamshire, including the Department for Health Workforce Race Equality Standards, a joint Social Work Health Check Action Plan, Schwartz Rounds and the education and training of social workers.

### **Other Options Considered**

59. No other options have been considered.

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

60. The report provides an opportunity for the Committee to consider any further actions arising from the information contained within the report.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

61. 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**

62. The costs of all the initiatives are met from a combination of grant funding (DfE, What Works Network, Step-up to Social Work training), apprenticeship levy, existing staffing budget held by Children's Social Care teams, the existing budget held by the Learning & Organisational Development and Workforce Planning & Development Team.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

1) That Committee considers whether there are any further actions it requires in relation to the information contained in the report.

**Steve Edwards**  
**Service Director, Youth, Families and Social Work**

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

Diana Bentley  
Principal Child and Family Social Worker  
T: 0115 8040768  
E: [diana.bentley@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:diana.bentley@nottsc.gov.uk)

### **Constitutional Comments (LW 10/0/22)**

63. Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report.



## **Financial Comments (LCD 14/02/22)**

64. The costs of all the initiatives are met from a combination of grant funding from the (DfE £0.271m, What Works Network and Step-up to Social Work training), apprenticeship levy, the existing staffing budget £25m held by Children's Social Care teams, the existing budget held by the Corporate Learning & Organisational Development and Workforce Planning & Development Team £0.138m.

## **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.

C1543