

## **SOCIAL WORK 'HEALTH CHECK' REPORT 2014**

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## **1. Acknowledgments**

This report is the result of the input of qualified social workers across the children's social care division who have contributed by participating in a staff survey and focus groups.

Diana Bentley, Principal Child and Family Social Worker, has been supported by colleagues from the Planning and Quality Assurance Team, Transformation Team, Workforce and Organisational Development Team, Health and Safety Team and the Occupational Health Team.

The project was sponsored by Steve Edwards, Service Director for Children's Social Care.

Martin Sleath, Joint Branch Secretary, Notts Unison and Sandra Duckworth from GMB supported with the development of the 'health check' staff survey 2014 and also jointly facilitated the focus groups with Diana Bentley.

## **2. Introduction and background information**

This report is a summary of the responses made to the 2014 Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social Care Social Work 'health check'.

The Social Work Task Force in its final report published in November 2009, presented an initial framework to help employers and practitioners to take action in assessing the 'health' of their organisation on a range of issues affecting workload:

- Effective workload management
- Pro-active workflow management
- Having the right tools to do the job
- A healthy workplace
- Effective service delivery

The Standards of employers of Social Workers in England (May 2014) advises that all employees of social workers should "complete, review and publish an annual 'health check' or audit to assess whether practice conditions and working environment of the organisation's social work workforce are safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led."

Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social Care completed a 'health check' and associated action plan in 2011, 2012 and 2013. This has enabled ongoing learning and comparison with previous years and is a valuable tool to monitor the progress of the organisation.

## **3. Health check project objectives and methodology**

The aim of the health check has been to gather relevant information which can inform conclusions and recommendations to improve the working environment and wellbeing of our social workers.

Information is drawn from the following sources in completing this report:

- Current available performance data
- Workforce data
- A staff survey of social workers
- Targeted focus groups
- National data
- Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social care 'health check' 2013

A staff survey was designed in collaboration with Trade Union representatives to enable comparison with previous surveys completed within the organisation and also national surveys which have been completed by external bodies during the last 12 months.

In November 2014 an electronic staff survey was sent to all of 433 qualified social workers (including managers) working for children's social care in fieldwork teams and non-fieldwork teams. In total 209 social workers and managers replied, a response rate of 48% (an increase of 10% from last year and a 17% increase since 2012).

Of these 149 were completed by fieldwork social workers and managers from:

Team	% of responses	No. of responses
MASH	4.76%	7
Emergency Duty Team	2.72%	4
Assessment Team South	8.84%	13
Assessment Team North	20%	15
Bassetlaw District Child Protection Team	8.16%	12
Newark District Child Protection Team	10.88%	16
Mansfield District Child Protection Team	10.88%	16
Ashfield District Child Protection Team	3.40%	5
BGR District Child Protection Team	4.76%	7
Children's Disability Service	5.44%	8
Permanence Team	6.80%	10
Looked After Children Team	10.88%	16
Court Team	7.48%	11
Other	4.76%	7

and by 60 social workers and managers from non-fieldwork services:

Team	% of responses	No. of responses
Access to resources	1.69%	1
CAMHS	6.78%	4
Adoption service	13.56%	8
Support after adoption	8.47%	5
Bassetlaw Fostering	3.39%	2
Ashfield Fostering	10.17%	6
Mansfield Fostering	10.17%	6
Newark Fostering	3.39%	2
South Notts Fostering	5.08%	3
Family Futures	3.39%	2
Short breaks fostering DCS	1.69%	1
Safeguarding and independent review	6.78%	4
Child protection coordinators	5.08%	3
IRO	6.78%	4
Family resource	1.69%	1
Other	11.86%	7

In 2014 and 2013 88% of social workers who responded to the survey were permanent employees of Nottinghamshire County Council whereas in 2012 this figure was 92%.

Five focus groups were arranged in November 2014 by Diana Bentley, Principal Child and Family Social Worker with representatives from UNISON and GMB Trade Unions. All children's social care social workers and managers were sent invitations to attend and 18 fieldwork social workers chose to attend these meetings. Although this is a relatively small sample, this represents 12.3% of fieldwork social work workforce and was an increase from the 8 people who attended in 2013

#### **4. Effective workload management including vacancy rates and workload**

##### Vacancy rate

The vacancy rate is reported at nil due to the use of agency (interim) staff to cover staff vacancies. In September 2014 there were 37.5 full time equivalent (FTE) vacancies being covered by interim (agency) social workers in Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social Care.

In November 2014 Community Care reported that their annual investigation found that across the UK there was a 27% increase in spending on agency staff in children's services. Although the use of agency social workers has been important and has enabled Nottinghamshire County Council to continue to provide a quality service to children and their families, the current evidence is showing

that contrary to the national picture in Nottinghamshire there has been a reduced reliance on agency social workers in 2014.

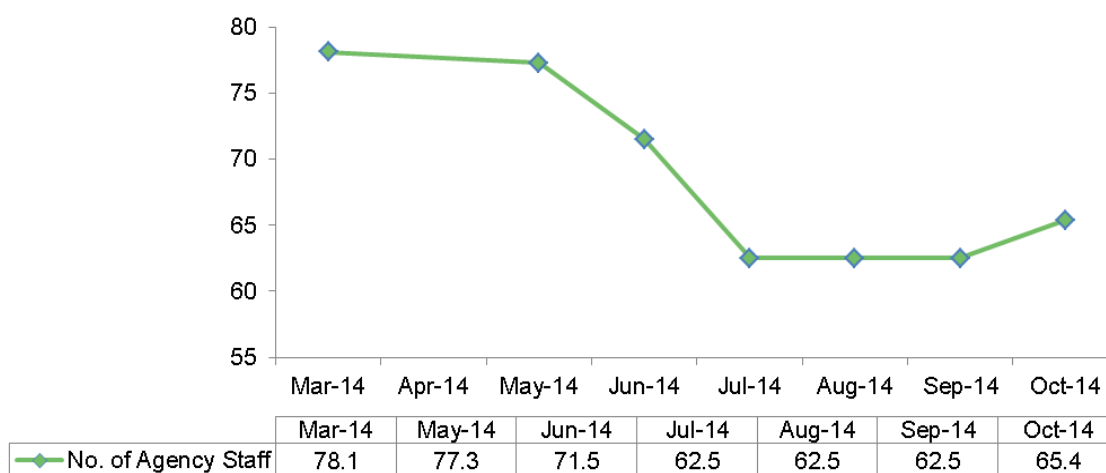
Over the last year Nottinghamshire County Council has used agency social workers to cover a wide range of social work posts. From September 2013 to September 2014 the overall number of agency staff employed by Nottinghamshire County Council Children’s Social Care fell by 10.6 full time equivalents (FTE).

The table below presents data from the finance department giving a breakdown of the roles which agency social workers have filled over a three year period.

	Children’s Service Manager	Team manager	Social Worker	Child Protection Coordinator	Independent Reviewing Officer	TOTAL
Sept 2012	4	10	41.4	3.5	2	60.9
Sept 2013	2	13	52.1	4	5	76.1
Sept 2014	3	6	52.3	2.5	1.6	65.4

This shows that the employment of agency social workers in Nottinghamshire as a total reached a peak in 2013 and has since decreased, though the use of agency social workers to cover social worker (as opposed to management or specialist roles) has remained virtually static. The table below gives a further indication how the overall numbers of agency staff reduced during 2014.

No. of agency staff per month March 2014 – October 2014

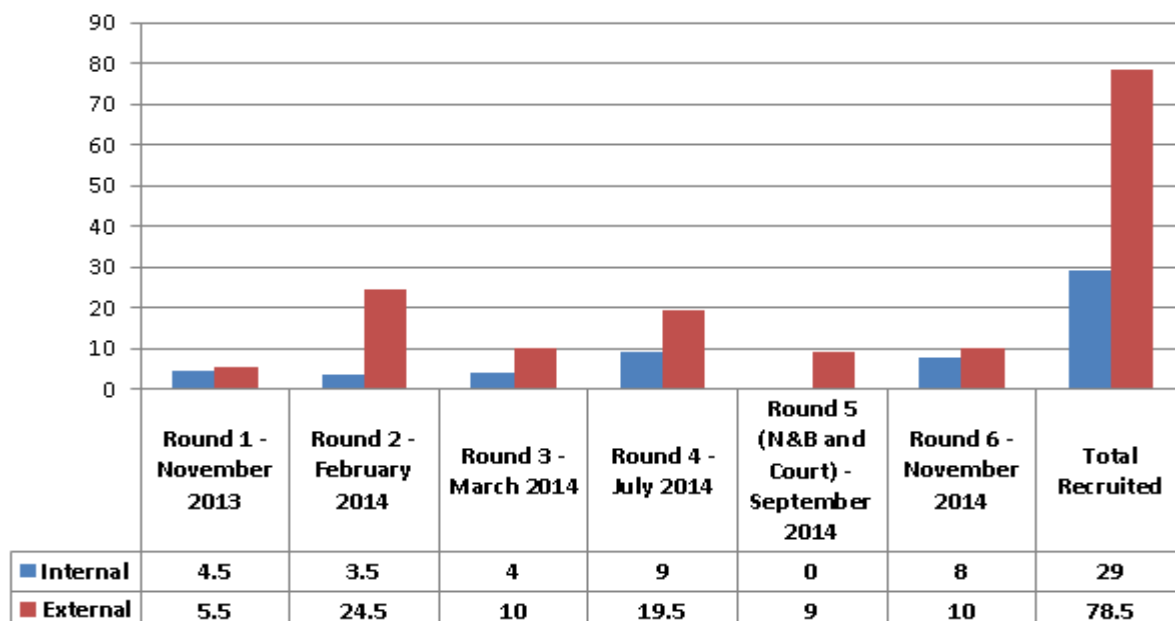


## Recruitment

Nottinghamshire County Council, Children’s Social Care has continued to recruit to permanent vacancies, and has over the last four years succeeded in recruiting significant numbers of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW).

Nottinghamshire County Council has recognised that there is a highly competitive market for the recruitment of good quality social workers and a project has been specifically working on this. Nottinghamshire County Council now has a consistent brand for social care recruitment and since November 2013 over 600 applications for social care posts have been received and 107.5 full time equivalents (FTE) posts have been recruited to.

The graph below gives a breakdown of the recruitment of people to FTE posts November 2013 to November 2014.



### Retention

The retention of permanent, experienced social workers in frontline roles is a challenge faced by Nottinghamshire County Council, Children’s Social Care and nationally by many local authorities. Nottinghamshire County Council has been working on a retention strategy to try to encourage and support workers to remain working for the authority.

Nottinghamshire County Council provides a comprehensive Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for newly qualified social workers who enter the workforce. The table below shows how many Newly Qualified Social Workers have entered the ASYE Programme (formally NQSW) over the last four years.

Completed NQSW Scheme	2011 - 2012	27
Completed NQSW (ASYE) Scheme	2012 - 2013	23
Completed ASYE Scheme	2013 - 2014	38
Started ASYE Scheme	2014	50
<b>TOTAL NQSW on the ASYE programme over 4 years</b>		<b>138</b>

When social workers are appropriately skilled and qualified to undertake more complex casework they can make an application for progression from pay scale band A to band B. The diagram below shows how many social workers have successfully progressed in the last 4 years.

2011	25
2012	19
2013	27
2014	29
<b>TOTAL number of social workers progressed from band A to band B (experienced social worker grade)</b>	<b>100</b>

These figures indicate that Nottinghamshire County Council is able to successfully recruit Newly Qualified Social Workers and that during the last 4 years 100 social workers have continued working for the department and achieved progression to being an ‘experienced social worker’ as defined by the Social Work Professional Capabilities Framework (College of Social Work).

## Stability of workforce

The table below shows how long respondents to the 'health check' survey have worked in their current post.

How long have you been in post?		
	Field work, social workers	Non-field work services, social workers
0 – 1 year	32% (47)	10% (6)
1 – 2 years	36% (52)	22% (13)
3 – 4 years	12% (17)	25% (15)
5 years and over	20% (29)	42% (25)

Health Check Survey 2014

This shows that 68% of social workers in fieldwork teams have been in their post for less than 3 years, whereas in non-fieldwork teams only 32% of social workers have been in post for less than 3 years. This data suggests that there is more instability within fieldwork teams and that the majority of workers in fieldwork roles do not stay in these positions for more than 2 years.

The table below shows that within non-field work teams the average age of a social worker is higher than in field work teams. In Non field work teams 64% of the workforce report that they are 46 years or over, whereas in fieldwork teams only 35% of the work force are 46 years or over. This suggests that as social workers progress through their career they are more likely to move out of field work services ad into non-fieldwork services.

What is your age?		
	Fieldwork	Non-fieldwork
16-25 years	6% (8)	2% (1)
26-35	27% (35)	11% (6)
36-45	31% (40)	25% (13)
46-55	28% (36)	35% (19)
56-65	6.% (8 )	25% (13)
Over 65	1% (1)	4% (2)

The tables below show the turnover of permanent staff during the 18 month period April 2013 to October 2014. This shows that in the 12 months April 2013 – March 2014, 77 people left their permanent positions, of which 55 ceased working for Nottinghamshire County Council and 22 were promoted into other positions. During this period 52 people also started working for the department which equates to a nett loss of 3 permanent workers. In the 6 month period April 2014 to October 2014 there has been a nett increase of 4 people working in these roles.

### Turnover Rates for Permanent Staff (April 2013- March 2014)

		Starters	Leavers		
		Total Starters	Left NCC	Promoted to another NCC post	Total Leavers
<b>Fieldwork</b>	Social Work Services	28	32	19	51
<b>Non-fieldwork</b>	Access to Resources	21	21	2	23
	Safeguarding / independent review	3	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>52</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>77</b>

BMS

## Turnover Rates for Permanent Staff (April 2014 -October 2014)

		Starters	Leavers		
		Total Starters	Left NCC	Promoted to another NCC post	Total Leavers (including promotions)
<b>Fieldwork</b>	Social Work Services	21	18	3	21
<b>Non-fieldwork</b>	Access to Resources	10	11	1	12
	Safeguarding / independent review	4	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>35</b>

BMS

This identifies that despite the success seen in the recruitment of social workers, the retention of experienced social workers in fieldwork services does continue to be a challenge.

In 2014 the Guardian in association with CAF/CASS undertook a national study “understanding the working lives, attitudes and motivations of social workers”, for the 2014 ‘health check’ comparative questions have been asked of the social workers working for Nottinghamshire Children’s Social Care which enables us to have some evaluation with national findings.

In your current role are you?				
	National	Nottinghamshire CSC Field work	Nottinghamshire CSC Non-fieldwork	Nottinghamshire CSC
Happy	63%	59% (79)	73% (41)	63%
Unhappy	No data	7% (10)	4% (2)	6%
Neither happy or unhappy	No data	33% (44)	23% (13)	30%
No view	No data	1% (2)	0	1%

The table above show us that for social workers working in Nottinghamshire their overall “happiness” at work is in line with the national findings and in some teams / work areas the levels of “happiness” at work are greater in Nottinghamshire than the national average.

For the 2014 ‘health checks’ social workers in Nottinghamshire were asked to describe their current role. 60% (113) of all child care social workers described their role as either rewarding or fulfilling with 21% (39) social workers described their role as frustrating. When broken down this showed that for non-field work social workers only 9% (5 respondents) found their job frustrating, whereas 26% (34 respondents) in field social work roles felt frustrated in their role.

42 social workers gave additional information in response to this question which are summed up in these responses:

- “I feel that I am happy within my role .... I have great support from my manager”
- “I enjoy working with families and work in a great team”
- “Sometimes I like what I do other times I do not. I do not feel there is much respect in the department for front line social workers you only gain this if you go to management”
- “It is rewarding but equally very demanding and limiting on work life balance”

A Study carried out by Community Care in conjunction with TMP Worldwide (2014), found that “Nearly one out of every 10 social workers is looking for a job outside the profession and found that 8% were looking to leave the profession”. A further national survey published in the Guardian 2014 showed that 52% of respondents were considering leaving social work. To get an understanding of the Nottinghamshire social work workforce the 2014 ‘health check’ survey asked social workers what professional role they hoped to have in 12 months’ time. The table below shows the responses made for fieldwork and non-field work social workers and an overall score for the whole social work workforce.



<b>In 12 months' time, do you hope to be?</b>			
	Fieldwork	Non-fieldwork	Total
Working in the same job	50% (65)	68% (38)	55%
Working for Nottinghamshire County Council in a different social work role	30% (29)	11% (6)	19%
Working for another organisation in a social work role	8% (11)	5% (3)	7%
No longer working in a social work role	4% (5)	2% (1)	3%
Other	17% (22)	14% (8)	16%

These findings positively contrast with the national surveys and show that in Nottinghamshire only 3% of social workers are planning to leave the profession in the next 12 months. Over half of our social work workforce is intending to be in the same job in 12 months' time and a further 19% of the workforce hopes to continue to work for Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care in a different social work role. The answers to this question shows that although for fieldwork and non-field work there is the same proportion of social workers who wish to continue working for Nottinghamshire County Council as a social worker a higher proportion of social workers in non-fieldwork roles intend to stay in the same job for the next 12 months while in fieldwork teams a higher proportion of respondents are hoping to move into an alternative role within the department.

30 social workers answered "other" to these questions; most of these stated that they were undecided about their future role, partly because of uncertain personal circumstances (relocation and family issues) and due to being agency (interim) social workers and therefore not able to determine this far in advance where they will be working . These answers included:

- "As I am an agency worker, I do not anticipate being in this role in 12 months' time, however, I would be pleased if my time were to be extended."
- "working in the same job but following a career path to move on"
- "Working in the same job, but with a different Local authority where pay conditions are better"

Hays UK salary and recruiting trends 2015 suggests that at the current time up to 70% of companies are planning to recruit new staff over the next 12 months and 61% of employees questioned anticipated moving jobs in the next 12 months. This shows that the recruitment and retention of qualified, experienced staff is not a unique problem faced by children's social care services.

Whilst it is the case that child care social workers have specifically trained to do this role we must not lose sight that the skills and experiences social workers have are valuable to other markets and industries and as the economic upturn progresses we need to ensure that we continue to provide a working environment which encourages experienced and competent social workers to remain working in frontline, fieldwork social work roles.

For the 2014 'health check' social workers were asked what factors would encourage them to remain working in their current role. The diagram below shows the responses made to this question and that overall the four factors which are seen as most important in encouraging social workers to remain in their current role are:

1. Higher salary
2. Improved work life balance
3. Less bureaucracy
4. More face to face contact with children and their families

It is of note that for social workers in non-field work teams improved technology was ranked as their fourth highest factor and more face to face contact with children and their families was not seen as so important. This suggests that workers in these teams / services are currently more able to have face to face time with the children and families they work with while fieldwork social workers struggle to do this.

What factors would encourage you to remain working in your current role?						
	Fieldwork social workers		Non-fieldwork social workers		Total	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Less bureaucracy	65%	3	56%	2	63%	3
Improved work / life balance	71%	=1	50%	3	65%	2
Improved technology	40%	10	46%	4	42%	5
Higher Salary	71%	=1	68%	1	70%	1
Pool Cars	9%	11	6%	11	8%	11
Flexible working hours	35%	6	36%	=7	35%	7
Improved office environment	31%	7	36%	=7	32%	8
More face to face time with children and their families	63%	4	36%	=7	55%	4
Improved learning and development opportunities	23%	9	40%	=5	28%	10
Career development	36%	5	40%	=5	37%	6
Increased job satisfaction	29%	8	28%	10	29%	9

40 people gave supplementary information regarding factors which would encourage them to continue working for Nottinghamshire County Council, these responses included:

- “I am currently on the ASYE and feel I am getting lots of good training. I like the idea of flexible working hours and TOIL
- “The IT systems are often inefficient and repetitive and would benefit from a far more efficient approach that aims to help Social Workers with case recording and episode completion far more”
- “The team is too big and it is horrendous being expected to have such a vast patch (county wide) changes need to be made so people are not burned out by driving and then driving home from offices miles away.”
- “I enjoy what I do however the work has a significant impact on my work life balance as I have to complete work in my own time”
- “Praise/Thanks and understanding”
- “I am happy with my current situation within the Authority”

During staff focus groups social workers explained that they are aware that permanent members of staff have decided to leave the department and join an agency due to the higher salary which can be earned in these roles and the greater flexibility regarding working hours and time off work which they can have.

A national study of 2,100 social workers completed by Community Care and advertising agency TMP (2914) found that of those looking to leave social work, 23% said the job was too stressful or affecting their health, 20% cited high caseloads 17% talked of too much paperwork and 14% not spending enough time with clients.

### Workloads

In 2014 the Guardian in association with CAFCASS undertook a national study “understanding the working lives, attitudes and motivations of social workers” The national survey identified that the demands on social workers are greater than ever and over the last 6 years caseloads have increased, bureaucracy and red tape have increased significantly and demands on social workers are greater.

The table below shows how many cases (individual children) were open to an allocated social worker in Nottinghamshire County Council, Children’s Social Care on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014, which teams these cases were open to and whether the child was the subject of a child in need assessment or plan, a child protection plan or a looked after child.

**2013**

Group	No. of Cases	%	CIN	CPP	LAC
Assessment North	231	5%	14	2	1
Assessment South	401	9%	12		2
CDS	432	10%	244	36	46
District CPT	2,245	51%	912	729	99
Other	11	0%	3	2	
Through Care	1,101	25%	26	9	767
<b>Total:</b>	<b>4,421</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,211</b>	<b>778</b>	<b>915</b>

Business Objects Caseloads 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013**2014**

Group	No. of Cases	%	CIN	CPP	LAC
Assessment North	204	5%	19	6	1
Assessment South	210	5%	8		4
CDS	315	8%	161	23	50
District CPT	2,077	53%	1,050	581	77
Other	14	0%	1	7	
Through Care	1,107	28%	35	27	736
<b>Total:</b>	<b>3,927</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,274</b>	<b>644</b>	<b>868</b>

Business Objects Caseloads 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014

This shows that between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014 there was an 11% reduction in the number of cases (children) with an allocated social worker, indicating that the increases in allocated cases (children) seen in Nottinghamshire in the previous three years has stabilised.

The number of allocated cases only offers a crude measure of the work being undertaken and does not represent the complexity of the work, the skill required to do it and the time scale in which it should be completed.

A workload management (WLM) tool is in operation in fieldwork teams where managers are expected to complete scores regarding individual workers workloads on a monthly basis. These scores take into account the number of cases as well as the complexity, risk, time and type of work undertaken by each worker.

The ideal score for social workers would be in the sustainable range, although competent and experienced social workers can, at times, have case weighted scores that fall within a higher range. The WLM scores should be used by managers to chart the workload for the individual workers over time and also how one social workers workload compares with colleagues.

On quarterly basis (March, June, September, December) WLM scores for all teams are collated and a service wide analysis of workflow and case allocation charted.

The table below offers a summary of the Assessment Teams September 2013 to September 2014 which shows that the majority of workers have consistently had 'sustainable' caseloads during this 15 month period.

Assessment Teams	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	22	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
December 2013	41	41 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
March 2013	42	38 (90%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)
June 2014	32	23 (72%)	3 (9%)	6 (19%)
September 2014	17	17 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The following table offers a summary of the workload management scores for District Child Protection Teams (DCPT) September 2013 to September 2014 which shows that more workers in these teams have 'demanding' or 'high' case loads and that during this 15 month period there has been little change in the numbers.

DCPT	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	80	60 (75%)	11 (14%)	9 (11%)
December 2013	84	58 (69%)	16 (19%)	10 (12%)
March 2013	101	73 (72%)	18 (18%)	10 (10%)
June 2014	93	56 (61%)	26 (28%)	11 (12%)
September 2014	89	75 (84%)	6 (7%)	8 (9%)

The table below offers a summary of the workload management scores for the Children's Disability Service (CDS) September 2013 to September 2014 which shows a trend towards more social workers having 'demanding' and 'high' caseloads.

CDS	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	16	11 (69%)	4 (25%)	1 (6%)
December 2013	14	9 (64%)	2 (14%)	3 (22%)
March 2013	10	2 (20%)	5 (50%)	3 (30%)
June 2014	11	3 (27%)	2 (18%)	6 (55%)
September 2014	8	6 (75%)	0 (0%)	2 (25%)

The table below shows the workload management scores for the Court Team September 2013 to September 2014 which each month shows fewer social workers with 'sustainable' caseloads and an increase in the number of social workers with 'demanding' and 'high' caseloads.

Court Team	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	17	15 (88%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
December 2013	17	13 (76%)	4 (24%)	0 (0%)
March 2013	16	11 (69%)	3 (19%)	2 (12%)
June 2014	14	6 (43%)	2 (14%)	6 (43%)
September 2014	16	6 (37%)	6 (37%)	4 (26%)

The table below offers a summary of the workload management scores for the Permanence Team, which shows an increase in the numbers of workers who have 'sustainable' caseloads.

Permanence Team	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	13	3 (23%)	4 (31%)	6 (46%)
December 2013	13	3 (23%)	8 (62%)	2 (15%)
March 2013	7	6 (86%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
June 2014	14	9 (64%)	5 (36%)	0 (0%)
September 2014	13	10 (77%)	1 (8%)	2 (15%)

The table below offers a summary of the workload management scores for the Looked After Children (LAC) Team, which also shows a trend towards more workers having 'demanding' caseloads and fewer having 'high' caseloads.

LAC	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
September 2013	25	13 (52%)	9 (36%)	3 (12%)
December 2013	29	18 (62%)	6 (21%)	5 (17%)
March 2013	28	19 (68%)	5 (18%)	4 (14%)
June 2014	30	17 (57%)	12 (40%)	1 (3%)
September 2014	17	13 (76%)	4 (24%)	0 (0%)

Despite some workers in some teams having demanding or high caseloads the overall analysis of the work load management scores which have been completed shows that the majority of workers (79%) do have sustainable caseloads. In the table below caseloads in September 2014 are compared to those in September 2013 showing a small increase in the percentage of workers with a 'sustainable' caseloads and a reduction in the percentage of workers with 'high' caseloads.

	Number of Social Workers	'Sustainable'	'Demanding'	'High'
		(75 to 95 points)	(95 to 110 points)	(110+ points)
All Teams Sept 2013	173	124 (72%)	29 (17%)	20 (12%)
All Teams Sept 2014	160	127 (79%)	17 (11%)	16 (10%)

In the 2012, 2013 and 2014 social work surveys fieldwork social workers were asked whether or not their managers use the workload management tool as a part of their supervision session.

Does your manager use the workload management tool as a part of your supervision session?						
	Response 2012		Response 2013		Response 2014	
	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number
Yes	55%	41	40%	48	34%	43
No	8%	6	12%	14	11%	15
Sometimes	16%	12	26%	31	16%	20
N/A	21%	16	12%	14	27%	34
Do not know					11%	14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>75</b>		<b>120</b>		<b>126</b>

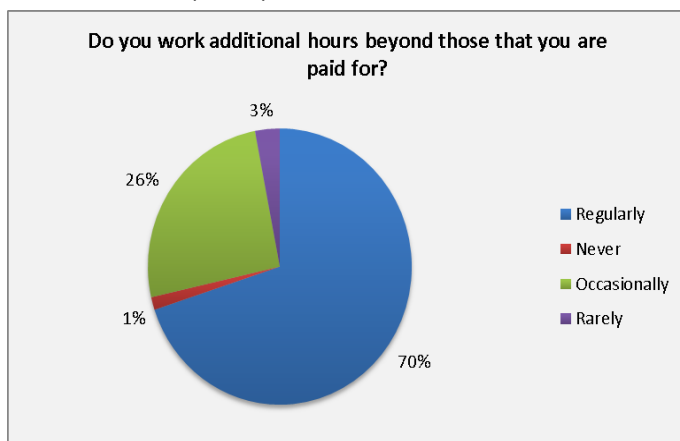
Social Work Health Check Survey 2012, 2013 and 2014

These answers indicate that year on year fewer social workers are aware of the completion of their workload management scores and therefore will not have a sense of the levels of work they are undertaking.

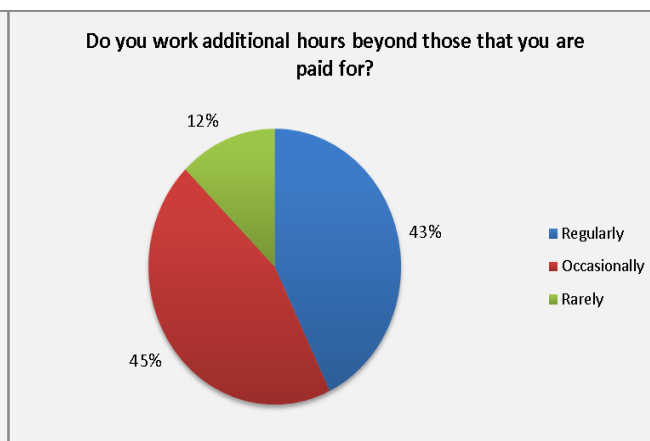
It is also noted that there is not always full compliance with Team Managers and Service manager submitting WLM scores for their staff. The WLM scores do not show an individual social workers story and also do not show us whether it is the same social worker(s) or different people who have demanding and high caseloads each month. If the same social worker month on month has a high case load this is likely to result in increased pressure being placed on the worker and a risk of reduced performance and consequently less favourable outcomes for children and young people.

Average hours worked by staff on a weekly basis

The staff survey asked social workers in both fieldwork and non-fieldwork roles whether they work additional hours beyond those they are paid for. The diagrams below show that in fieldwork teams higher proportions (70%) of social workers report to regularly working additional hours than in non-fieldwork teams (43%).

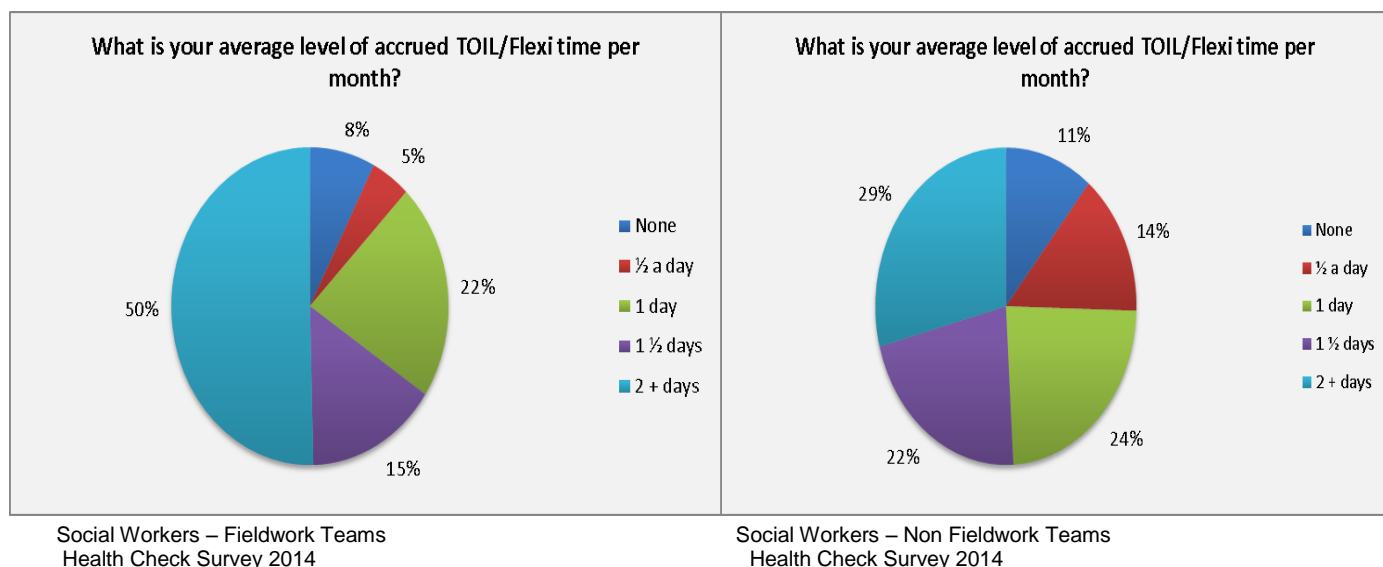


Social Workers – Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014



Social Workers – Non Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014

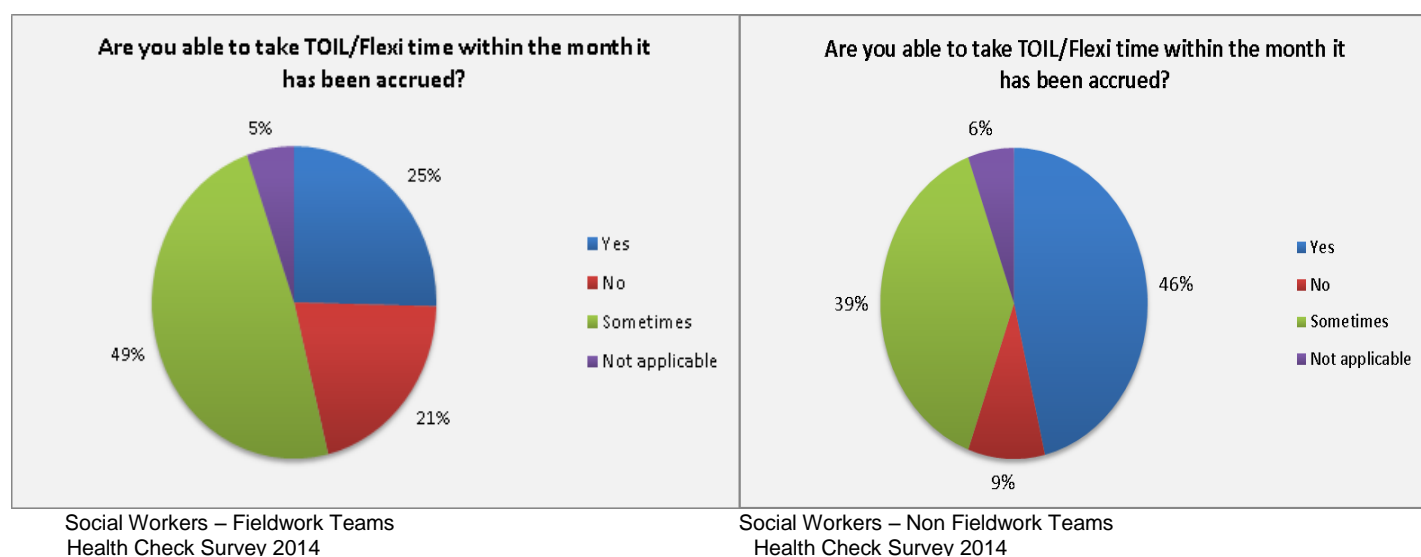
Findings from the 2014 staff survey show that 50% of our social workers from fieldwork teams (66 people) and 29% of our social workers from non-fieldwork (16 people) normally work in excess of 2 additional days per month. These figures show that within fieldwork services there has been no change since 2013 with half of the workforce continuing to work at least 2 additional days per month, whereas in non-fieldwork services the survey has shown an 8% reduction since 2013 in the number of social workers who do more than 2 days additional work per month.



58 of the 184 respondents (31%) felt that they were normally able to take TOIL / flexi time within one month of accruing it which is an 8% increase since 2013 and nearly restores this back to the level of 2012 when (33%) gave this answer.

In response to the findings of the Children’s Social Care ‘health check’ 2013 a management guidance note was written, circulated and published on the intranet giving advice to managers regarding the consistent application of TOIL / flexi time across the department.

It is notable that the staff survey does suggest that it has become a little easier for social workers who do work additional hours to claim back this time, but the diagram below illustrates a continuing disparity between fieldwork social workers and non-fieldwork social workers in this respect.



The Health Check survey 2014 identifies that many social workers regularly work additional hours (as detailed in the diagrams above) with 70% of fieldwork social workers stating that they never or only sometimes able to claim back the hours they had worked.

Social workers who attended the focus groups reported that “in general social workers don’t mind working some additional hours”. For most of the attendees they stated that in general managers are flexible and try to accommodate workers taking TOIL. This however is not always possible due to pre-planned work and the demands of a full case load. There were still some inconsistent practices identified with TOIL being recorded in different ways, different cultural practices within team and a feeling that not all managers had the same way of working.

The lack of work / life balance is cited in national and local social work surveys as one of the key factors encouraging social workers to look at other career options and therefore something Nottinghamshire County Council children’s Social Care does need to consider.

Within focus groups it became apparent that for some social workers in some teams there have been difficulties taking annual leave at times which suit the workers. One social worker explained that when they came for their job interview they explained that they had a family commitment and wished to take annual leave over the Christmas period. During the interview this was agreed, however once she had started her job she was told by the manager that due to staffing levels and the need of the service she could not take the full period of leave she had wanted. It was noted that in larger teams it was easier for staff to take annual leave when they wanted, but in smaller teams this was not the case.

One of the focus group was attended by six agency social workers. In this meeting it was clearly cited that some social workers do work for agencies because they “like the flexibility of taking leave when (they) want and for longer periods of time”.

Induction

A good induction is absolutely vital, it ensures that starters are settled and feel confident in their new role. In 2012 social workers newly appointed to the department identified a very varied experience of induction. Some experienced a well-planned and informative induction period, while others had an extremely poor experience. For this reason the 2012 ‘health check’ action plan identified the need to improve the induction process for new starters and for managers to be advised of their responsibility toward new starters. In 2013 a new Children’s Social Care induction pack was developed, and in July 2013 the Social Work Practice Consultant’s Team began to facilitating fortnightly induction workshops for new starters.

The table below shows that since 2013 there had been an improvement in the induction experience of new staff.

<b>How would you rate your induction to Children’s Social Care (only for those in post 12 months or under)</b>				
	Fieldwork social workers		Non-fieldwork social workers	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
Good	47%	66%	78%	100%
Average	39%	66%	22%	
Poor	15%	11%		

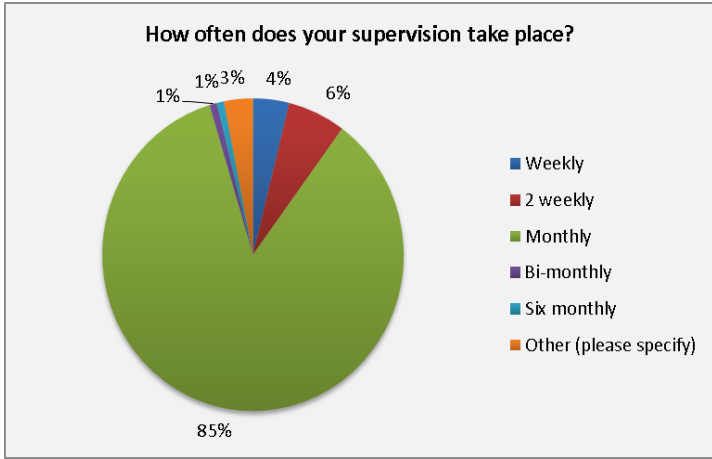
Health Check survey 2013 and 2014

Several workers made additional comments, showing that new starters did receive a planned induction and were welcomed by their manager and new team colleagues. Some agency social workers commented that in most local authorities they have not received an induction and were impressed that when starting in Nottinghamshire an induction was provided. There however were also some workers who continued to receive a poor induction these comments included:

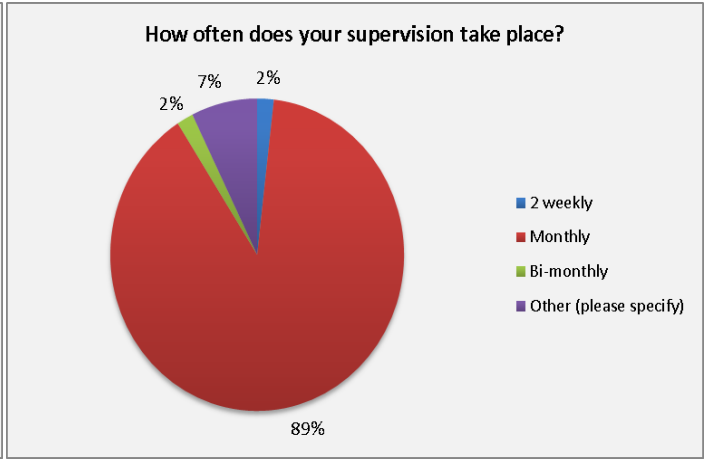
- “I didn’t have an induction but obtained information from colleagues as required”
- “I didn’t have an induction to my new role as a team manager”

Staff supervision and development

Nottinghamshire County Council, Children’s Social Care has a formal supervision policy and additional practice guidance outlining expectations for supervision. The social work ‘health check’ survey 2014 showed that social workers feel that the frequency and quality of supervision has remained very good over the last 12 months. 96% of the social workers who responded to the survey confirmed that their supervision takes place at least on a monthly basis, with some of these having fortnightly supervision.



Social Workers – Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014

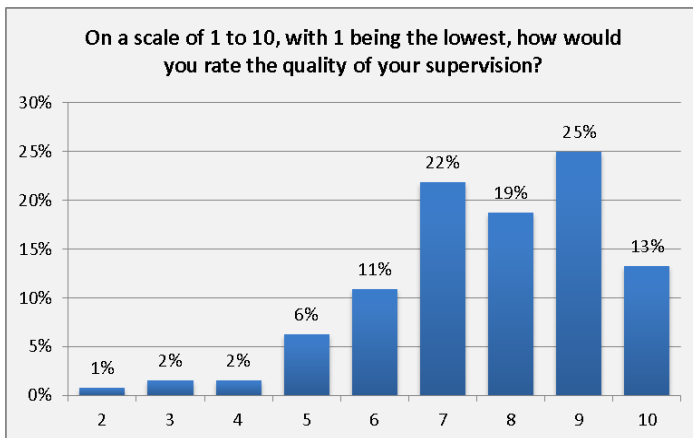


Social Workers – Non Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014

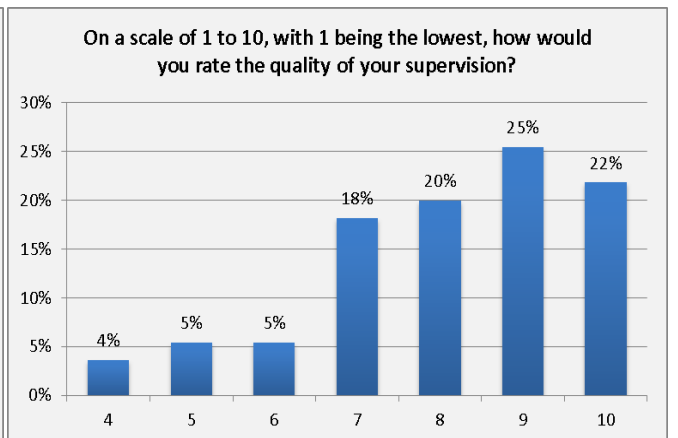
In 2013 only 3% of fieldwork social workers reported that their supervision was never cancelled with 73% reporting that it was frequently cancelled. In 2014 there has been a positive change with 30% of fieldwork social workers now reporting that their supervision is never cancelled and only 17% stating that it is frequently cancelled, 88% of Respondents also reported that when supervision is cancelled this is rearranged within a month of the previous session.

88% of fieldwork social workers reported that if supervision is cancelled this was re-arranged immediately, and in non- fieldwork services supervision was re-arranged immediately in 95% of cases. In 2013 61% of social workers who completed the survey rated the quality of their supervision to be 8/10 or higher in 2014 this figure has increased with 66% (120 people) rating the quality of their supervision to be 8/10 or higher.

The graphs below shows 57% of respondents from fieldwork teams and 85% of respondents from non-fieldwork teams rated the quality of supervision as 8/10 or higher. In 2013 only 6% of respondents (10 people) from across the service rated the quality of their supervision as 3/10 or lower. In 2014 there are fewer people (1.6% or 3 respondents) now feeling that their supervision is of that poor quality.



Social Workers – Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014



Social Workers – Non Fieldwork Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014



This is very positive for Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care as the national survey completed by Community Care and TMP's research (2014) cited good management support as the number one factor social workers looked for in a new employer.

Nottinghamshire County Council has a formal Employee Performance and Development Review process (EPDR). For the 2014 'health check' social workers were asked what proportion of training they attended was identified through the EDPR process. For fieldwork social workers 67% of respondents confirmed that all or most of their training was identified in a formal EPDR, whereas for non-fieldwork social workers 50% of their training was identified this way.

The social work 'health check' survey confirmed that despite training needs not consistently being identified during the EDPR process 92% of social workers in fieldwork teams and 80% of social workers in non-fieldwork teams felt that there were relevant training options open to them (showing an increase since last year).

During staff focus groups social worker reported that there are good learning opportunities for staff to access. A group of agency social workers commented that they had found the training and developmental opportunities available in Nottinghamshire for agency and permanent members of staff to be superior to other local authorities they had worked for. It was noted in three focus groups that staff briefings given by Social Work Practice Consultants within teams have been very useful.

Some workers commented that there are regular e-mails regarding training event and that this can feel like a 'bombardment' as there appears to be no training plan or structure to the training which is offered.

In 2013 45% of fieldwork social workers reported that they had previously needed to cancel training or CPD events due to re-prioritisation of their workload, however in 2014 this had significantly reduced to 37% of workers which indicates that greater priority is now being given to attending training and development events.

Some experienced social workers take on additional responsibilities by acting as Practice Educators to support students on placements, being mentors for Newly Qualified Social Worker's undertaking their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE), being members of specialist panels, and representing the department in other forums.

For many social workers having additional or new responsibilities is rewarding, and gives additional developmental opportunities. Of those that responded to the social work survey 2013 only 30% (48 people) reported that they were able to undertake additional duties and responsibilities. However in 2014 this has also improved with 38% (71 people) stating that they were able to take on additional duties and responsibilities.

During the academic years September 2013 – July 2014 and Sept 2014 until present Nottinghamshire County Council have hosted student placements and provided practice educators for 79 student social workers. These placements have been for students attending a range of universities including Nottingham Trent, Nottingham, Derby, Lincoln, Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, York, Birmingham, Manchester Metropolitan and Norwich.

In focus groups social workers explained that many of them do have formal and informal responsibilities within their teams. One worker who had previously worked in a drug treatment service explained that people in the team ask her for information regarding this area of work, others also commented that they give informal support to colleagues as and when needed. Workers commented that they often feel that they have knowledge and skills which would be useful to others and would welcome an opportunity to have further training or guidance regarding how to facilitate learning events and to mentor and support others.

When giving supplementary information respondents generally reported that their managers are supportive of their desire to act as an ASYE mentor and / or Practice Educator. The information available suggests that experienced social workers who want to are feeling able to take on these important mentoring and coaching roles.

Other additional duties which respondents reported doing were:

- PAM Trained
- Theraplay
- DDP Therapy
- Adoption Panel
- AIM's trained, although I have not been called upon yet and quite a while since I undertook the training.
- I have been trained to complete video interviews, however have not been asked to complete any at this time.

The answers identified that there are some workers who do have specialist skills and training who would be prepared to use these skills but are not currently being asked to do so.

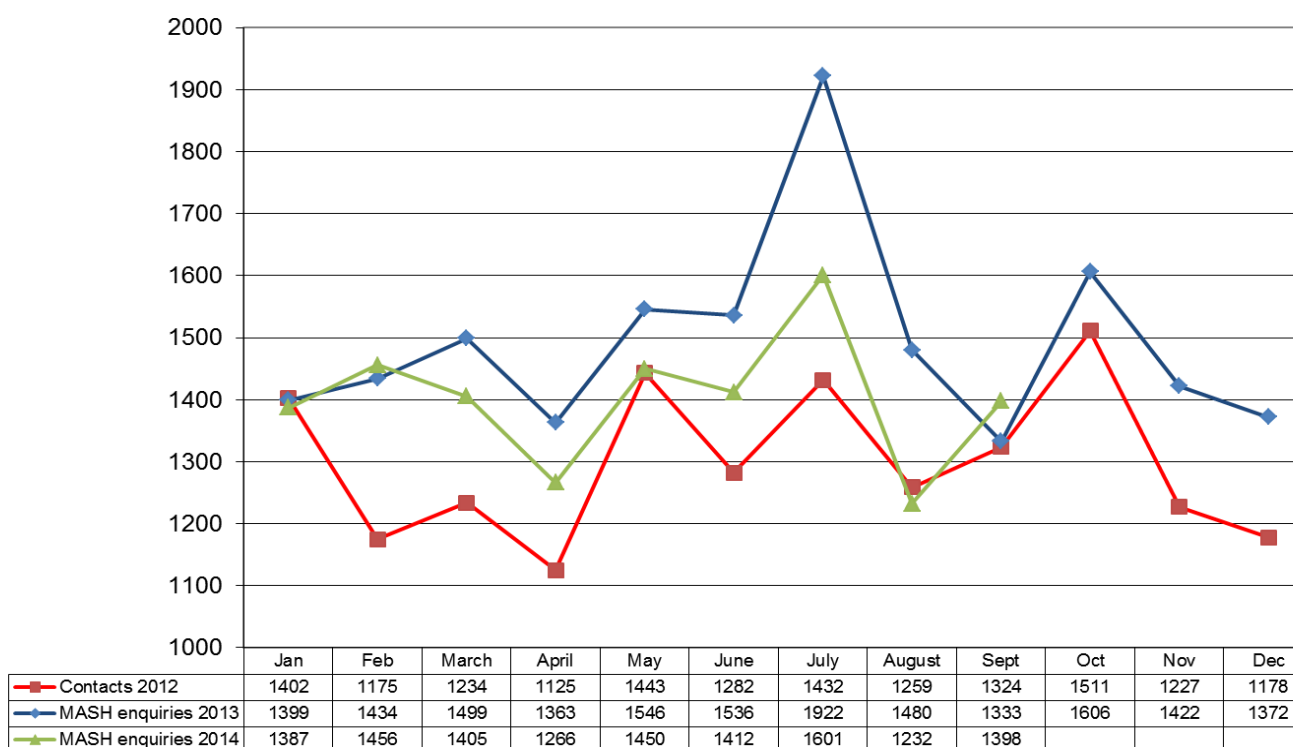
## 5. Proactive Workload Management

### Number of unallocated cases

Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social care does not have any unallocated cases. All children and young people who are in need of a statutory assessment or services do have a named social worker as their key professional.

During the period since the last health check was completed there has been continuing pressure on the service; however some more positive trends are being identified which indicate that the pressures and demands on the service are stabilising.

The table below shows that the number of referrals (MASH enquires) in 2014 have been lower than 2013, however for all months (bar August 2014) they remain at a higher rate than those dealt with by the department prior to the launch of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in Dec 2012. The diagram below illustrates the number of MASH enquiries January 2013 to September 2014 compared to the number of Contacts January 2012 to December 2012

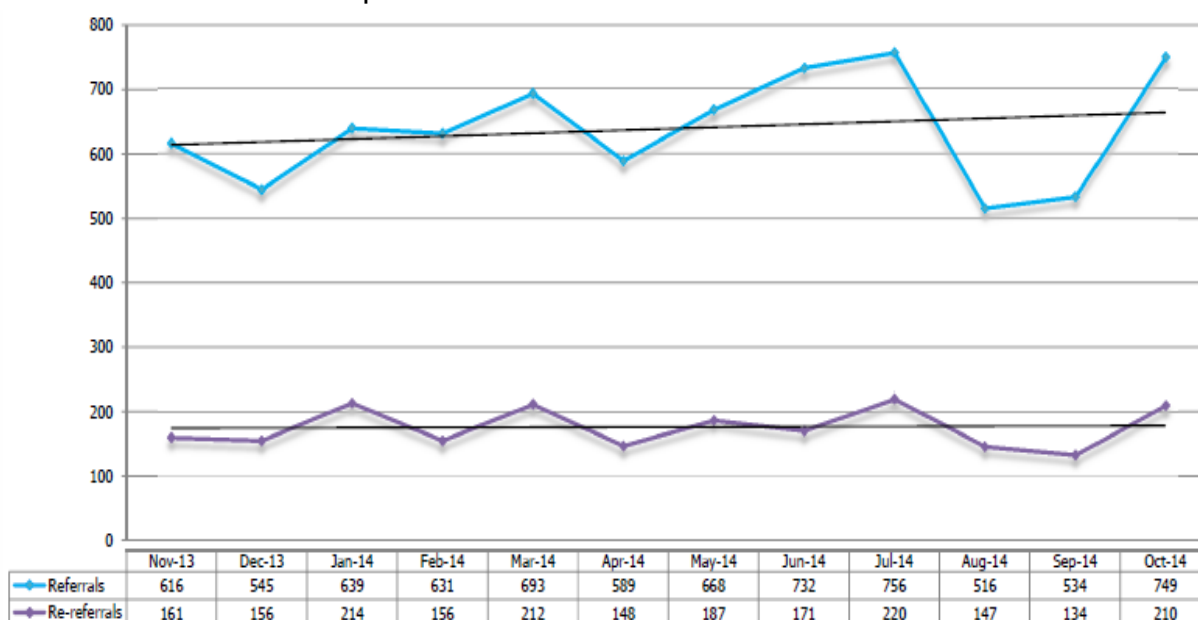


34% of social workers reported that due to the nature of their duties they did not need to transfer cases to other teams. Of those who did need to transfer work they were asked whether or not they were able to transfer cases in a timely manner at an agreed point 72% confirmed that cases were always or regularly transferred in a timely manner. The diagram below shows that the case transfer process has improved since last year and in the opinion of the social workers this is the best it has been since the 'health check' started in 2011.

Are you able to transfer cases in a timely manner at agreed points?				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Always	4.5%	20%	14%	26%
Regularly	42%	52%	48%	46%
Occasionally	21%	9.5%	23%	23%
Rarely	32%	16%	12%	4%
Never			3%	1%

### Re-referral rates

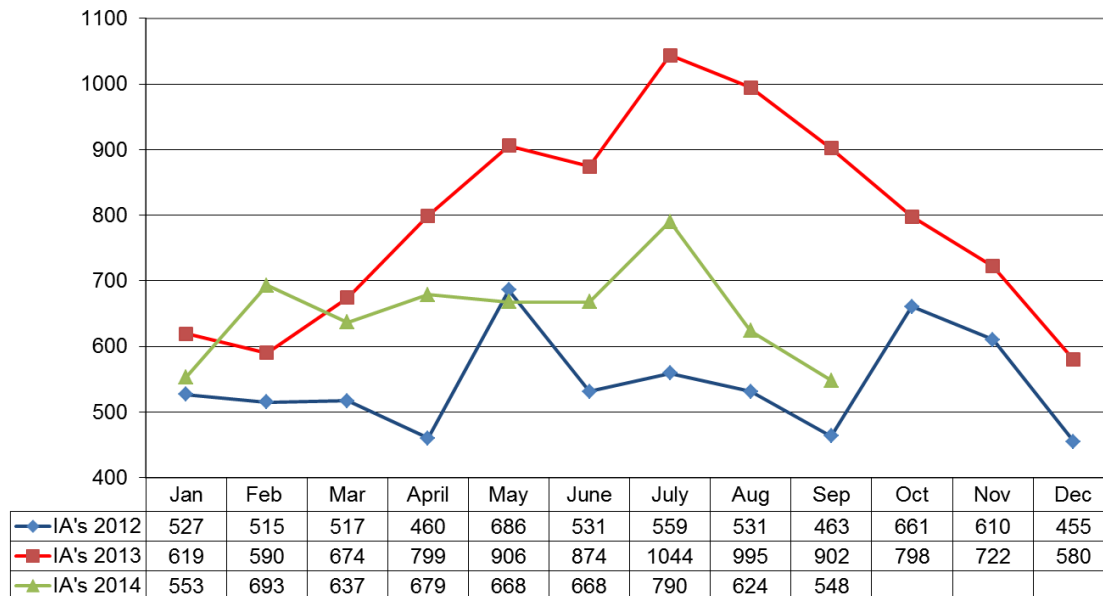
The graph below shows the number of referrals taken by children's social care and the average number of re-referrals in the period Nov 2013 to Oct 2014.



Data available shows that during 2014 the re-referral rate has remained consistent at 25 – 27%

### Change in workflow over time (peaks and troughs)

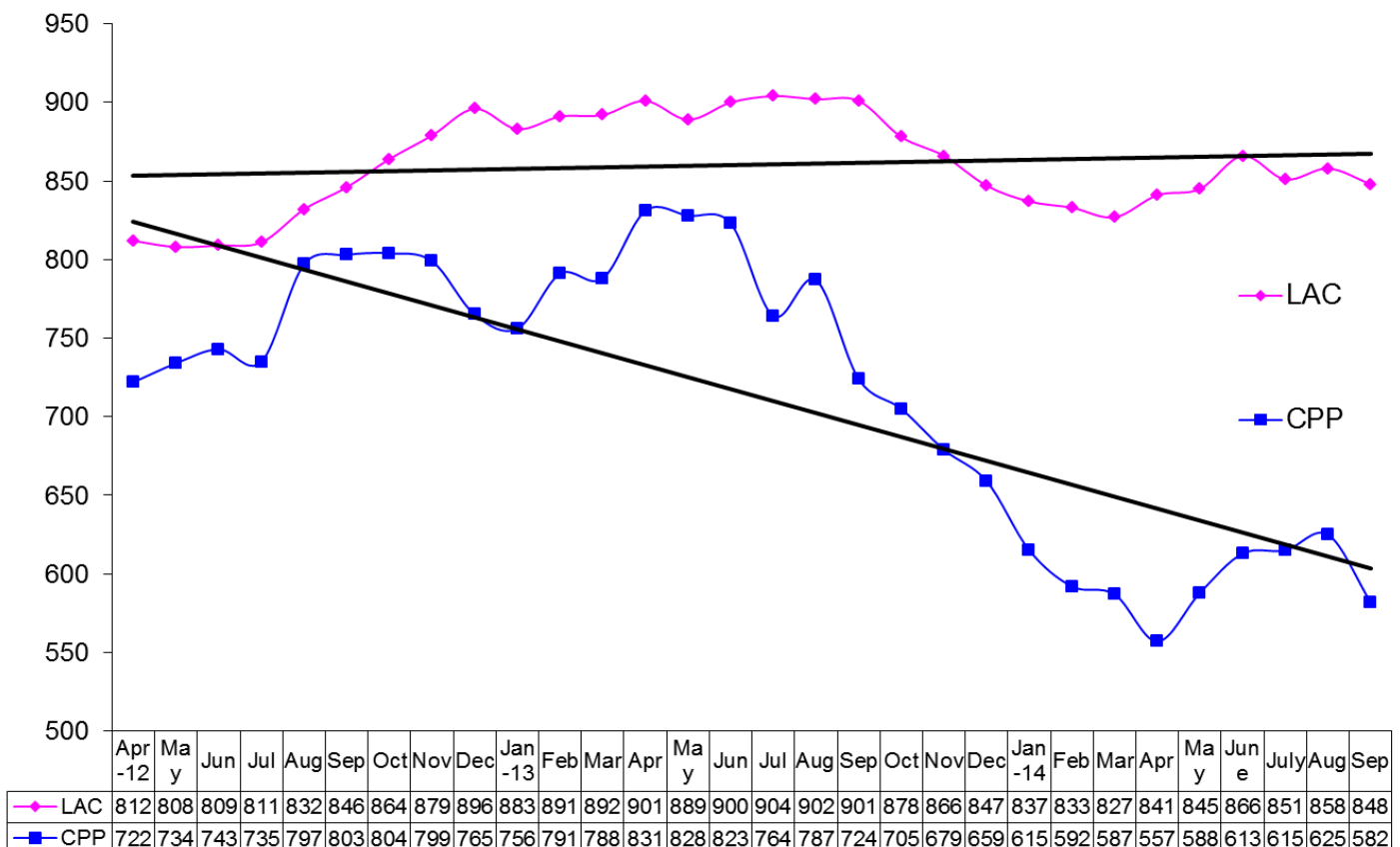
The graph below shows the number of Initial Assessments completed by children's social care in the last three years. This clearly demonstrates that in 2013 there were significantly more Initial Assessments completed than the previous year however in 2014 the rate has notably reduced and is continuing to show a downward trend.



Business Objects

The graph below shows the numbers of children in Nottinghamshire who were the subject of a child protection plan or Looked After Children in the period April 2012 to September 2014. This shows that during this period the number of children looked after by the department has gradually increased. When compared to national data and that of our statistical neighbours the slight upward trend in the overall number of looked after children can be seen as a positive realignment to levels that would be expected of an authority of the size and demographic makeup of Nottinghamshire.

This graph below also shows that during this period there has been a downward trend in the number of children who are the subject of a child protection plan. This also shows a greater alignment with other local authorities who have similar demographic compositions.

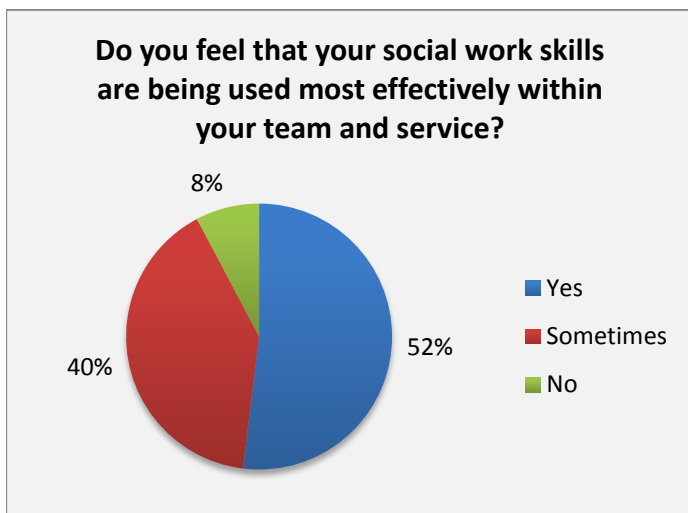


## Efficient use of skills

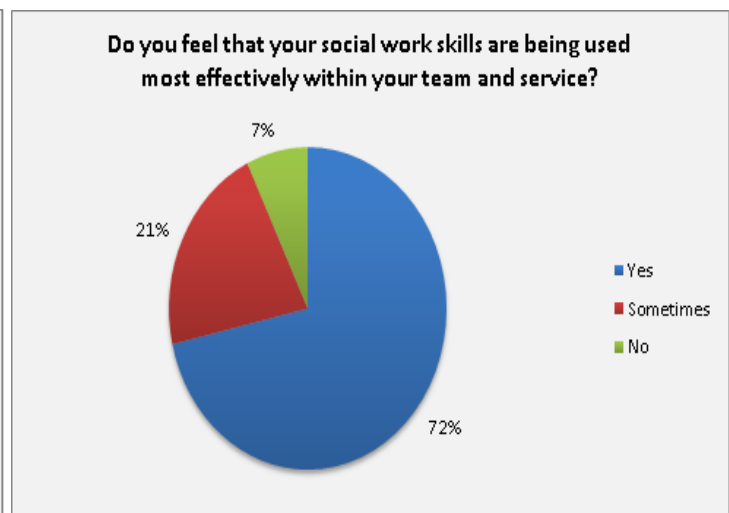
As part of the 'health check' survey and in focus groups social workers were asked whether their social work skills are being used most effectively within their team or service area.

During focus groups comments were made that fieldwork social workers spend 'massive' amounts of time spent in front of computers, typing minutes of core groups, letters and scanning and uploading documents. Social Workers who had experience of working in other local authorities suggested that in Nottinghamshire there is less administrative support for social workers than in other places. A comment was made that in another local authority apprentices were used to do these basic but essential administrative duties. Comments were also made that although some social workers complain about the Framework-i case recording system this is one of the better systems used by local authorities.

In 2012 social workers in fieldwork and non-fieldwork teams gave similar responses, showing that 75% of social workers did feel that their skills are being effectively used in their teams. In 2013 fewer workers felt that their skills are being used most effectively, with 57% fieldwork social workers and 70 % of non-field work social workers confirming that this is the case. The diagram below show that in 2014 52% of field work social workers feel that their social work skills are being used most effectively with in their teams, where as 71% of non-field work social workers do feel that this is the case.



Social Workers – Field Work Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014



Social Workers – Non Field Work Teams  
Health Check Survey 2014

Some additional comments were made by respondents to the 'health check survey' showing examples where social workers feel that their skills are being appropriately used:

- "I feel completely supported and encouraged to develop and use my Social Work skills. We have regular team meetings with foster carers and have a therapeutic social work team who meet regularly, this provides the opportunity to consider and discuss how our skills can be best put to use."
- "As a SWPC the team continues to use my social work skills and knowledge effectively which leads to job satisfaction on my part."

However for some social workers they either feel that their skills are not used, prioritised or acknowledged such as:

- "I do feel I have more to offer, given my CP experience particularly with the current difficulties in CP teams, i.e. in the main newly qualified staff."
- "I rarely write court reports now and feel that this is a skill that is not being used."
- "I spend a lot of time 'fire fighting' rather than doing quality work with families."
- "I feel that as a Social Worker I am bogged down with more administrative tasks such as framework episodes (that could be completed by anyone i.e. authorise services) typing up minutes, and case notes."
- "I am a glorified admin worker and my skills are neither known about, understood or acknowledged."

79% of social workers in fieldwork teams and 78% of social workers working in non-fieldwork services felt that some of the tasks they do could be undertaken by someone else.

113 respondents gave additional information, two social workers who gave additional information to this question offered views which were echoed by the other respondents.

- “A great deal of the most time consuming tasks could be undertaken by a worker who is not a qualified social worker. I feel this is the biggest waste of time and money within NCC.”
- “There is an awful lot of administration work in the Social Work role. This has been an ongoing issue, particularly in children’s services teams; paperwork, form filling, chasing up people, coordinating things take up a good 50 percent of our job if not more.... I worked in a child protection/children’s services team and I feel it would make more sense if each Social Worker had their own admin; that would free them up to do 2 or 3 times more work out in the community and would be more cost effective than having agency workers? Other professionals (doctors, consultants etc) have their own admin/p.a. - admin provide the backbone of the service they are so important; they free up social workers time so that they can use their social worker training and skills where it is needed most. This point is most relevant to children’s services I feel.”

Specific duties and tasks which social workers felt should be completed by someone else included:

- Phone calls and typing letters
- Scanning. We are now responsible for doing our own scanning - this is time consuming and things are being scanned in incorrectly.
- Arranging Meetings, room bookings and obtaining venues
- Minuting
- Authorised services
- Formatting documents
- Typing onto Framework

Managers also identified tasks which they complete which if completed by someone else could increase efficiency one manager commented that “A lot of admin tasks have now been given to managers and as I only do them occasionally it takes me a long time each time”.

Specific activities which managers felt could be completed by someone else included:

- Recruitment
- Purchasing of equipment for staff
- BMS and CAS
- Collating, printing, and distributing information
- DBS checks

In 2015 Nottinghamshire County Council Children’s will be starting a Social Work Practice Pilot in four fieldwork teams, introducing a new role of Support Officer on a ratio of 1 support officer to 4 social workers. The pilot will evaluate whether social workers have more capacity to spend time with children and their families, and whether this investment leads to a service where the professional skills of social workers are utilised more efficiently.

## **6. Having the right tools to do the job**

### **Access to equipment, professional support services and resources**

Respondents to the survey were asked where they access NCC IT to do their work. The table below shows the answers given by social workers in both fieldwork and non-fieldwork teams. This highlights the fact that social workers regularly use their work base, but due to the mobile nature of their job they also access work based computers from a variety of settings.

	Field work, social workers		Non-fieldwork services, social workers	
	Percentage	Response Count	Percentage	Response Count
Home	55%	71	79%	44
Mobile device	13%	17	5%	3
My work base	93%	120	98%	55
Touchdown zones	66%	86	57%	32
Any other NCC building	30%	39	32%	18
Other	3%	4	11%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>119 answered</b>		<b>56 answered</b>

Health Check Survey 2014

These figures are fairly consistent with the finding in 2013; the most notable change is that in 2013 71% of fieldwork social workers had access to home working however in 2014 this figure has reduced to 55%.

Social workers were asked whether they were able to access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems when they needed to. In 2013 70% of fieldwork social workers confirmed that they were able to access IT systems when they needed to, in 2014 this percentage has slightly reduced to 67%. In 2013 82% of non-fieldwork social workers said they were able to access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems when they needed to this has now reduced to 76% in 2014.

63 social workers gave supplementary information to this question. Most of these respondents wanted to be able to access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems at home, many of the respondent reported that they had not been provided with home working facilities or for those who did have this they found that it was unreliable and inconsistent. Several comments were made that workers did previously have home working, however their lap tops had recently been disabled by the department without warning or alternative provision being made.

Since the 'health check' 2013 Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care has had an innovative "Mobilisation Project" looking at how social workers (and other social care staff) can access to IT systems. In January 2015 the department is commencing a rollout of over 500 tablet devices to social care staff, designed to give staff greater flexibility of access IT systems, e-mails and documents and therefore addressing the deficits highlighted in the staff survey 2014.

Social workers were asked whether or not they have access to the right professional support for their work such as legal advice and translators. In 2013 90% of fieldwork social workers confirmed that they did have access to the right professional support, however in 2014 this had reduced to 82%. However for non-field work social worker in 2013 85% felt that they had access to the right professional support and in 2014 this has increased to 96% of social workers.

24 fieldwork social workers gave supplementary information. Respondents who needed legal advice confirmed that they were able to access this. Most of the respondents giving additional information wanted to express their recent dissatisfaction with the process for arranging for an interpreter or translation. Respondents advised that although the service was provided this was often slow and could not respond to urgent requests or the need for a service on the day of the referral.

73% of Fieldwork social workers who responded to the 2014 health check survey reported that they had access to resources for research, (10% increase since 2012). 85% of social workers in non-fieldwork teams (same as 2013) felt that they had the right access to recourses for research.

Following the Health Check 2012, Nottinghamshire County Council entered into a contract with CommunityCare Inform, a subscription based website which provides specialist resources, legal advice and research for children's social care workers. Due to the positive feedback given by

users of this resource the contract for 210 licenses has been renewed for a further 2 years until October 2016.

Respondents to the 'health check' survey 2014 have continued to confirm that CommunityCare Inform is a good source of information. Workers who gave supplementary information also explained that they get access to valuable tools, research and information from the University, Training and Development Events, Social Work Practice Consultants and information on the practice support intranet site. Social Workers also stated that due to pressures of work and time constraints they often felt unable to read or research information and would therefore welcome more practice briefings giving bite-size (peer reviewed) summaries of changes to the law, current research and tools which can inform practice. Comments were also made that some offices do not have safe storage or shelving where workers or teams can keep their resources and tools.

Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board have both transferred their procedures and practice guidance from paper documents to an electronic format (managed by tri.x) which everyone can access. It was therefore disappointing that responses to the 2014 staff survey showed that 19% of fieldwork social workers and 25% of non-fieldwork social workers had never accessed the Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care Procedures Manual, and 25% of fieldwork social workers and 46% of non-fieldwork social workers had never accessed the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board, Interagency Safeguarding procedures.

When giving supplementary information some workers commented that the tri.x hosted policies and procedures were easy to navigate, however more comments were made that workers were not aware that these existed and did not know that they, other professionals or families could access them.

## **7. A Healthy Work Place**

### **Arrangements for monitoring levels and quality of supervision**

The Quality Management Framework – Supervision Frequency guidance requires all managers to submit a return that reports the frequency of supervision within the quarter for the workers they supervise.

The returns provided for the period October – December 2014 show that 90% of supervisions occur within time scale and that 78% of staff have all of their supervision in timescales.

When supervision sessions do not take place these are due to:

Annual Leave	19%
Sickness	30%
Work Pressures	19%
Staffing issues	10%
Compassionate leave / other	19%

The responses made to the social work 'health check' survey 2014 reported on page 16 show that social workers are mostly feeling positive about the quality and quantity of the supervision they receive.

### **Arrangements for staff appraisals**

Nottinghamshire County Council has a corporate EPDR (Employee Performance and Development Review) and competency framework, which became mandatory for all employees from April 2012.

The 'health check' social work survey 2014 showed that 62% of social workers had all or most of their training or developmental needs identified during the EPDR process which shows an improvement in the effective use of EDDR's since 2013.



The Quality Management Framework, Supervision Frequency returns for Oct – Dec 2014 show that 78% of eligible staff have a current EPDR.

Following the completion of the 'health check' in 2013 Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care started to develop a supplement to the EPDR process for social workers which would assist managers to incorporate the HCPC, Continuing Professional Development and the Professional Capabilities for Social Workers into the process. This work was completed, however due to the proposed revision of the corporate EPDR has not yet been put into practice.

### Employee welfare system and access

Nottinghamshire County Council, Occupational Health (OH) Services has a team of OH professionals who provide confidential and impartial advice and support on matters relating to employees work. They aim to enable and support employees achieve and maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle, and advice and support managers on providing a safe and healthy working environment.

Managers can refer employees to OH or for counselling if they are concerned that health is affecting attendance, performance or conduct of an employee or if work is affecting their health. Also staff who are returning to work following long terms absence are assessed to ensure they are fit and receive the necessary support to enable them to return to work safely.

### Team meetings

Effective Team Meetings assist in engaging team members and can help to create a shared understanding / ethos, boost morale, provide an opportunity for learning and development, increase effectiveness, predict future staffing / workflow issues, and create a smoother running team.

The table below shows the reported frequency of team meetings in 2012, 2013 and 2014. The 2014 figures show that 94% of fieldwork teams and 96% of non-fieldwork teams have team meetings on a monthly (or more frequent) basis.

How often to team meetings take place?						
	2012		2013		2014	
	Fieldwork	Non-Fieldwork	Fieldwork	Non-Fieldwork	Fieldwork	No-fieldwork
Weekly	3%	0	0	0	1%	0
Fortnightly	17%	19%	9%	16%	8%	21%
Monthly	70%	64%	84%	66%	85%	75%
Bimonthly	4%	0	7%	14%	6%	4%
Six monthly			1%	4.5%	0	0
Never	0	2%	0	0	0	0

Health Check Survey 2012, 2013 and 2014

In 2014 92% of respondents to the survey stated that they felt that their team meetings were held regularly enough which is a 5% improvement since 2013. 90% of fieldwork teams confirmed that all members of the team were required to attend and 81% of non-fieldwork teams confirmed that this was the case. Respondents who gave additional information consistently stated that although workers were expected to attend not everyone did attend team meetings. Some workers felt that unless there was an urgent matter everyone should attend a team meeting whilst others felt that it was reasonable and acceptable to miss team meetings. 95% of respondents felt that they were always able to contribute to the team meeting agenda (6% improvement since 2013) with only 1 person stating that this was never the case.

94% of respondents in non-fieldwork teams confirmed that actions arising from the team meeting were always recorded. In fieldwork teams 89% of actions were always recorded, with 10% of teams sometimes recording the agreed actions. The table below shows that in fieldwork teams there has been a 19% improvement since 2013 in agreed actions being carried out.

<b>Are actions given at team meetings carried out?</b>						
	Fieldwork, social workers			Non-Fieldwork, social workers		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014
Yes	54%	38%	57%	71%	77%	65%
No	3%	6%	2%	0	0	0
Sometimes	43%	56%	40%	29%	23%	35%

Health Check Survey 2012, 2013 and 2014

Information provided indicates that the value of team meetings within Fieldwork Teams has improved, with meetings taking place more frequently in more teams and agreed actions being carried out more often.

### Accessibility to senior managers

Evidence from the 2014 survey indicates that the majority of child care social workers (81%) feel that senior managers are accessible and visible within their service.

The table below shows that most respondents to the social work survey believe that senior managers do have input in cases at appropriate times.

<b>Do senior managers have input into cases at the appropriate point?</b>		
	Fieldwork	Non-fieldwork
Yes	88%	89%
No	4%	2%
Not applicable	8%	9%

Health Check Survey 2014

13 social workers provided supplementary information, one worker commented that their service manager supported with duty tasks in the team room when there was a shortage of staff and that the team found this to be supportive and reassuring. Other comments were made by social workers that decisions from senior managers can take some time to come back to them and that these are not always recorded on the child's case file.

In 2014 Steve Edwards Service Director and Diana Bentley Principal Social Worker established the Nottinghamshire Children's Social Care Forum to give frontline social care staff a regular opportunity to communicate directly with senior management. In the 2014 'health check' survey 84% of fieldwork social workers felt that there were effective lines of communication between the workforce and senior managers which is a 15% improvement since 2013 and in Non-fieldwork teams 91% of social workers felt that there were effective lines of communication which is a 4% increase since 2013.

### Whistle-blowing policy

Whistleblowing is the term used to describe the situation where an employee raises a concern about "a problem" within the County Council which could threaten customers, colleagues, the public or the County Council's own reputation. If anyone has a concern about wrongdoing or malpractice within the County Council, they are encouraged to report this in accordance with the County Council's Whistleblowing Policy. The Whistleblowing Policy is available on-line and all new starters to the authority should be made aware of this during their induction.

89% (same as 2013) of respondents to the survey confirmed they were aware of it.

## Processes for ensuring staff safety whilst working away from the office base including out of hours

Nottinghamshire County Council is required to provide a safe environment, safe equipment and safe systems of work for its employees and those who may be affected by their work. These requirements are applicable to all work situations and particular attention must be paid to situations where staff work alone or outside normal working hours.

Over the last four years social workers have been asked whether there are effective processes in place to monitor their personal safety. The table below shows the response rate for all social workers to this question, and indicates that between 2011 and 2013 there was a year on year reduction in the numbers of workers who felt that there was an effective process in place to monitor their personal safety.

The safety of social workers who are often working alone in the community is something which has been taken very seriously and as a consequence in 2014 a health and safety leaflet for all staff was developed and circulated remaining everyone of steps they should be taking to promote their personal safety, a detailed document for managers was also developed and distributed giving guidance and instruction regarding assessing risk and control measures which should be taken to promote the safety of staff and finally new electronic lone working devices were purchased and distributed to staff.

The table below shows that in 2014 75% (18% increase since 2013) report that there is now an effective process in place to monitor personal safety.

<b>Do you feel that we have effective processes in place to monitor personal safety?</b>				
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Yes	61%	51%	47%	75%
No	39%	49%	53%	25%

The table below shows that in 2013 there was a significant difference between workers in fieldwork and non-fieldwork teams, with far more social workers in non-fieldwork teams feeling that there are adequate safeguards in place to monitor their personal safety whilst at work. In 2014 there has been an impressive increase for both fieldwork and non-field work should workers, however most notable is that this year 84% of fieldwork social workers now feel that there is an effective process in place to monitor their personal safety whereas last year this was only 40%.

<b>Do you feel that we have effective processes in place to monitor personal safety?</b>				
	Fieldwork		Non-Fieldwork	
	2013	2014	2013	2014
Yes	40%	73%	67%	80%
No	60%	27%	33%	20%

Health Check Survey 2013 and 2014

Social workers giving supplementary information recognised that there has been much progress in this area and that personal safety is now something which is acknowledged and talked about in teams. Although respondents were very positive of the advances made there were further steps suggested which could make this even better:

- Risk assessment regarding entering unhygienic properties and risk of contact with people with communicable diseases
- Team emergency planning
- Formal buddy agreements
- More joint working
- Ensuring that there is clarity of understanding and expectation for recording home visits on outlook calendar

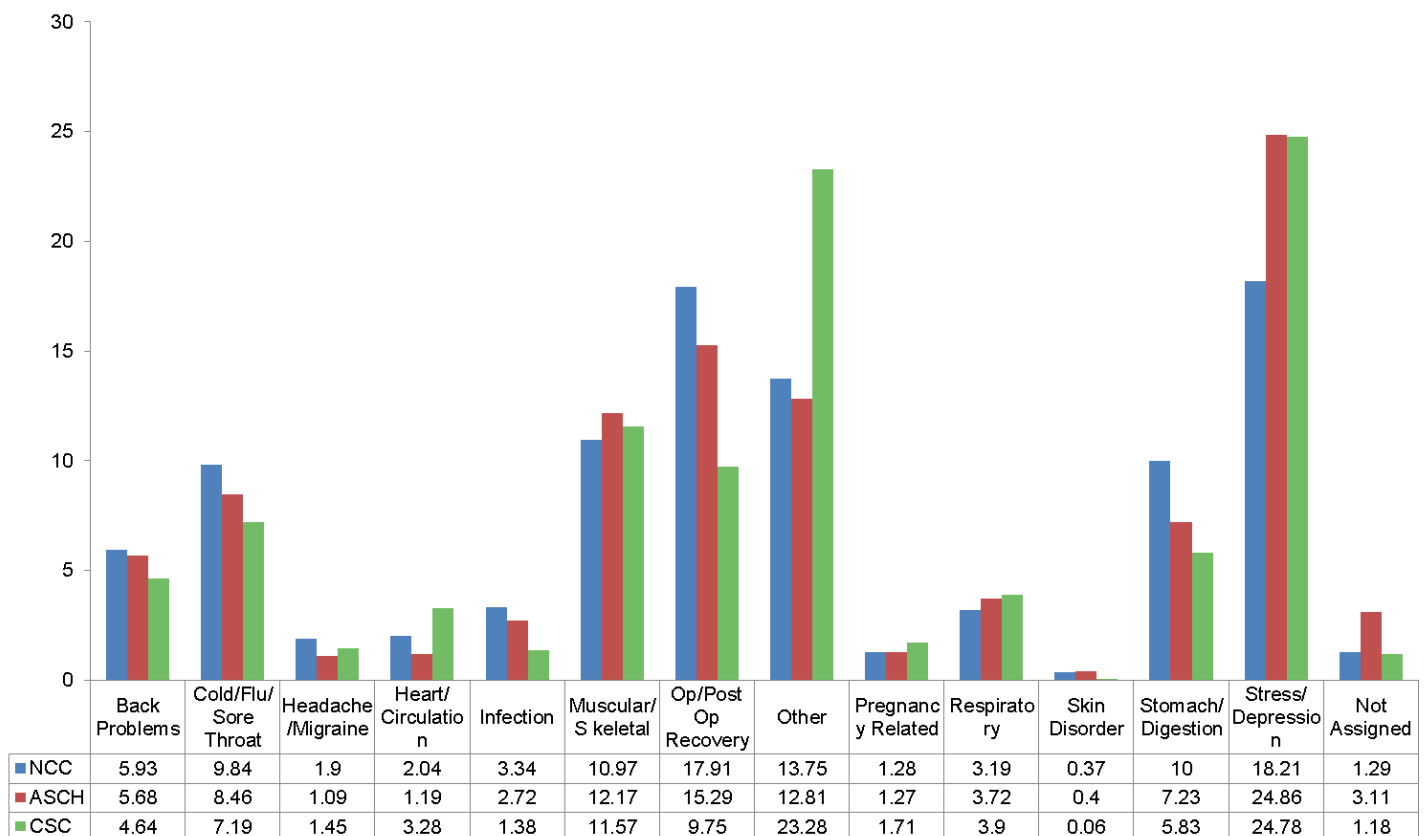
Nottinghamshire County Council has a formal process in place where staff are expected to report incidents to their manager (and the Health and Safety Team) so that appropriate risk assessments can be undertaken. Reports should be made for a number of incidents including when there are road traffic collisions, near misses, physical violence, verbal abuse or threats, work-related Injury, work related illness or anti-social behaviour.

The 2013 'health check' identified that the vast majority of reported incidents were reported by colleagues working in children's residential care units. Again in 2014 the Health and Safety Team have advised that incidents are not being reported by social workers or their managers.

### Absence Management

The following table gives a breakdown of the absence statistics relating to the period April 2013 to March 2014 giving a comparison between the absence rates for the whole of Nottinghamshire County Council, Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care. This shows that within the local authority stress / depression is the most frequent reason for absence. Within children's social care there are higher rates of absence due to stress / depression than the local authority workforce as a whole, with 25% of sickness absence for this reason (3% lower than reported in the 2013 'health check') but at the same level as Adult Social Care.

BMS - Sickness Absence Rate - Reasons for Absence (Nov 2013 – Oct 2014)



### Findings from compliments

In 2013 83% of social workers who responded to the staff survey confirmed that they had previously received a personal compliment, in 2014 94% of social workers confirmed that they have received personal praise in relation to their work which suggests that over the last 12 months colleagues and managers have become better at giving positive feedback and recognising the hard work of social workers.

Social Workers who attended focus groups commented that when compliments are made about practice these are normally shared with the individual worker by their manager. Most social workers believe that records of personal compliments are also kept on their supervision records. Comments were made that when compliments were acknowledged and shared by e-mail that this does help to boost team moral.

## **8. Summary and concluding remarks**

The responses made to the 2014 Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social Care Social Work 'health check' show that in all areas considered there have been improvements in practice.

Over the past 18 months there have been determined attempts made to recruit permanent social workers into vacant posts. The evidence suggests that the department has a good record in recruiting newly qualified social workers and retaining these workers in fieldwork posts for at least 2 years. The data available suggests that the turnover of staff is greater in fieldwork teams than non-fieldwork teams where social workers tend to be older and more experienced. There has been a continuing reliance on agency social workers in some teams during 2014 but the trend is starting to show a decrease and that there has been a small increase in the number of permanent social workers working for the department. This is obviously a trend which we want to build upon in the next 12 months and also try to ensure that more experienced social workers stay in their critically important fieldwork roles.

It is encouraging that for social workers working in Nottinghamshire their overall "happiness" at work is in line with the national findings and in some teams / work areas the levels of "happiness" at work is greater in Nottinghamshire than the national average. It is also positive that 60% of all child care social workers described their role as either rewarding or fulfilling.

Contrary to the results of national studies the 'health check' survey showed that only 3% of social workers in Nottinghamshire are planning to leave the profession in the next 12 months. Over half of our social workers intend being in the same job in 12 months' time and a further 19% hope to still work for Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care but in a different social work role.

Social workers were asked what factors would encourage them to remain working in their current role. The four factors which are seen as most important in encouraging social workers to remain in their current role were:

1. Higher salary
2. Improved work life balance
3. Less bureaucracy
4. More face to face contact with children and their families.

In the next 12 months we need to ensure that we learn from this study and also engage in deeper and more meaningful discussions with our fieldwork social workers and develop a model which will enable and encourage social workers to remain working in these roles.

During the period since the last health check was completed there has been continuing pressure on the service; however some more positive trends are being identified which indicate that the pressures and demands on the service are stabilising.

The number of referrals (MASH enquires) in 2014 have been lower than 2013, however for all months (bar August 2014) they remain at a higher rate than those dealt with by the department prior to the launch of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) in December 2012. The number of Initial Assessments completed 2014 has also reduced since 2013 and there continues to be a downward trend.

During the period April 2012 to September 2014 the number of children looked after by the department has gradually increased. When compared to national data and that of our statistical neighbours the slight upward trend in the overall number of looked after children can be seen as a positive realignment to levels that would be expected of an authority of the size and demographic makeup of Nottinghamshire. During this period there has been a downward trend in the number of children who are the subject of a child protection plan. This also shows a greater alignment with other local authorities who have similar demographic compositions.

Workload data shows that the number of children or young people with an allocated social worker in a fieldwork team has reduced since 2013. Workload management scores indicate that in some teams there has been a reduction in workload and pressure on social workers whilst in other teams the complexity of cases has increased and that the demands on the social workers have therefore increased. Now that there is more stability in the number of referrals being made to the department we have an opportunity to look at how caseloads and demands on social work teams can be made more equitable.

In national and local survey's social workers cite the lack of work life balance as being a key factor in encouraging them to leave their job. The 2014 'health check' staff survey showed that in fieldwork teams 70% of social workers regularly work additional hours beyond those they are paid for. The findings also showed that 50% of our social workers from fieldwork teams and 29% of our social workers from non-fieldwork normally work in excess of 2 additional days per month. Although it was encouraging to see from the survey that social workers were finding it easier this year to claim back some of these hours than they had last year there continues to be a disparity between fieldwork social workers and non-fieldwork social workers in this respect. It would appear that addressing the work life balance issue in a consistent manner across the service is going to be a key factor in retaining social workers in key posts where the demands and the perceived risks to social workers are the highest.

Social Workers in Nottinghamshire report a very positive experience of supervision. 96% of the social workers confirmed that their supervision takes place at least on a monthly basis, with some of these having fortnightly supervision. Supervision is less likely to be cancelled than in previous years and when it is cancelled most social workers confirm that this is immediately rearranged. Respondents to the health check also reported that they felt the quality of the supervision had improved since last year.

This is very positive for Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social care as the national survey completed by Community Care and TMP's research (2014) cited good management support as the number one factor social workers looked for in a new employer.

The social work health check survey confirmed that 92% of social workers in fieldwork teams and 80% of social workers in non-fieldwork teams felt that there were relevant training options open to them (showing an increase since last year). The number of social worker who needed to cancel training and development events due to the re-prioritisation of their workload has also reduced, indicating that greater priority is now being given to attending training and development events. This is also supported in the reports made by social workers confirming that in 2014 (for those that wanted it) that they had been more able to take on additional roles and responsibilities which enhance their own development and job satisfaction.

As part of the 'health check' survey social workers have been asked whether their social work skills are being used most effectively within their team or service area. In 2014 only 52% of fieldwork social workers felt that their social work skills were being used most effectively with in their teams, where as 71% of non-fieldwork social workers felt that this was the case. This is the question which received the most supplementary responses. 113 respondents gave additional information regarding duties and tasks which social workers felt should be completed by someone else and as a consequence freeing up their time to do better quality work with children and their families and also possibly saving some money for the department.

This is an area which directly relates to the frustration of fieldwork social workers in their role and the additional hours these social workers report working in order to do their work. In 2015 Nottinghamshire County Council, Children's Social Care are piloting a new model for Social Work Teams which include the creation of a new specialist support role, providing more direct and

specific support to social workers to enable them to perform their professional duties more efficiently. The development of these pilot teams and the evaluation of their impact will be very important as we progress and try to find solutions which fully utilise the talents and skills of social workers and provide an efficient and excellent service.

Social workers work from a fixed office base, the location of which will be determined by the team they work in, but due to the mobile nature of their job social workers also access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems from a variety of settings.

In 2013 71% of fieldwork social workers had access to home working however in 2014 this figure has reduced to 55%. Social workers were asked whether they were able to access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems when they needed to. In 2013 70% of fieldwork social workers confirmed that they were able to access IT systems when they needed to, in 2014 this percentage has slightly reduced to 67%. In 2013 82% of non-field work social workers said they were able to access Nottinghamshire County Council IT systems when they needed to this has now reduced to 76% in 2014. Staff report if they do not have access to IT systems when they need it they are not able to maintain their case records in the way they would like to and this again has a knock on effect to the levels of pressure felt by social workers and the amounts of additional hours they are working.

Since the 'health check' 2013 Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care has had an innovative "Mobilisation Project" looking at how social workers (and other social care staff) can access to IT systems. In January 2015 the department is commencing a rollout of over 500 tablet devices to social care staff, designed to give staff greater flexibility of access IT systems, e-mails and documents and therefore addressing the deficits highlighted in the staff survey 2014.

It is positive that 73% of Fieldwork social workers who responded to the 2014 health check survey reported that they had access to resources for research, (10% increase since 2012) and 85% of social workers in non-fieldwork teams (same as 2013) also confirmed that they had the right access to resources for research. It however was disappointing that responses to the 2014 staff survey showed that 19% of fieldwork social workers and 25% of non-fieldwork social workers had never accessed the Nottinghamshire County Council Children's Social Care online Procedures Manual, and 25% of fieldwork social workers and 46% of non-fieldwork social workers had never accessed the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board, online Interagency Safeguarding procedures. With these numbers of workers not accessing relevant policies and procedures there is a risk the local and statutory requirements are not being adhered to. In 2015 further action needs to be taken to ensure that all staff are made aware of the online resources and tools which they should be accessing and that everyone is able to access them when needed.

Effective Team Meetings assist in engaging team members and can help to create a shared understanding / ethos, boost morale, provide an opportunity for learning and development, increase effectiveness, predict future staffing / workflow issues, and create a smoother running team. It is encouraging that 94% of fieldwork teams and 96% of non-fieldwork teams have team meetings on a monthly (or more frequent) basis. Most social workers feel that team meetings are held at the correct frequency and in most teams there is an expectation that all workers should attend the meeting. During 2014 members of the Children's Social Care Practice Forum provided input in to the development of a new practice guidance regarding consistent team meetings which is due to be published in early 2015.

Information provided indicates that the value of team meetings within Fieldwork Teams has improved, with meetings taking place more frequently in more teams and agreed actions being carried out more often.

Evidence from the 2014 survey indicates that the majority of child care social workers (81%) feel that senior managers are accessible and visible within their service.

In the 2014 'health check' survey 84% of fieldwork social workers felt that there were effective lines of communication between the workforce and senior managers which is a 15% improvement since 2013 and in Non-fieldwork teams 91% of social workers felt that there were effective lines of communication which is a 4% increase since 2013.

Over the last four years social workers have been asked whether there are effective processes in place to monitor their personal safety. Between 2011 and 2013 there was a year on year reduction in the numbers of workers who felt that there was an effective process in place to monitor their personal safety.

The safety of social workers who are often working alone in the community is something which has been taken very seriously and as a consequence in 2014 a number of actions have taken place including the development of new practice guidance and the purchasing and distribution of electronic / digital lone worker safety devices.

It was therefore satisfying that in 2014 75% of social workers (18% increase since 2013) reported that there was now an effective process in place to monitor personal safety. Despite this significant improvement we must not get complacent and everyone must continue to ensure that the safety of staff is talked about in teams and that risk assessments are completed and control measure put in place when required.

## **9. Recommendations**

1. Continuing a targeted and specific plan to recruit and retain permanent social workers
2. Development of a model which will enable and encourage social workers to remain working in fieldwork roles.
3. Review of the Work Load Management process to ensuring that the data accurately demonstrates the complexity of work balanced with the workers level of skill and experience and that there is appropriate weighting given to allow new and less experienced staff time to develop their skills.
4. Review how the department can ensure the skills and talents of social workers are most effectively and efficiently used in all parts of the department.
5. Continuing to resource and support the mobilisation project to ensure that social workers do have access to NCC IT where and when they need it.
6. More short briefing notes to be written and circulated to all staff giving up to date information and advice regarding legal requirements, procedural changes and research which may be of use in practice.
7. All staff to be made aware of the how to access NCC and NSCB (Tri.x) online policies and procedures
8. Consistent approach to Team Meetings to be agreed and adopted in the department
9. Ongoing monitoring of personal safety and continuing development of resources and advice regarding ensuring the physical and emotional wellbeing of staff



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