

**12 February 2018****Agenda Item: 12****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL  
WORK****EXTENSION OF THE SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT OFFICER PROGRAMME****Purpose of the report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval for the extension of the temporary Social Work Support Officer posts in Children's Social Care until 31 March 2019.

**Information**

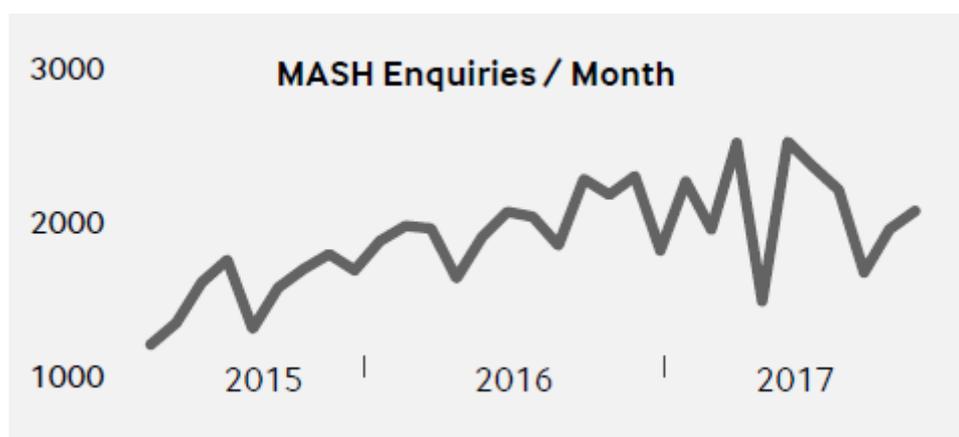
2. Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) posts were initially introduced to Children's Social Care as part of a pilot in 2015. The SWSO programme is based on the 'Reclaiming Social Work' model of child protection, which was successfully pioneered in Hackney and praised in the Munro Report<sup>1</sup>. The role does not require a social work qualification and aims to free up social work capacity, based on the following success criteria:
  - a) social workers are able to spend more time with the children and families they are supporting
  - b) outcomes for vulnerable children and young people are improved
  - c) improved morale of social workers, resulting in improved retention rates and a more stable workforce
  - d) improved throughput of social work cases
  - e) reduced reliance on agency social workers.
3. The SWSO programme forms part of a wider package of recruitment and retention initiatives to reduce agency spend in Children's Social Care and support workforce stability<sup>2</sup>. Other Council recruitment and retention initiatives include: a Market Factor Supplement for social work staff in frontline child protection teams; close collaboration with local higher education institutions to support the recruitment of newly-qualified social workers; a rolling recruitment programme; ICT and technological investment to support staff mobilisation; and ongoing training and development opportunities.
4. In the last five years, the County Council has spent £27.4m on agency staff in Children's Social Care, with the majority of this spend in the frontline child protection teams. Although this spend has reduced from £5.2m in 2016-17 to a forecast £4.2m in

<sup>1</sup> The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A Child-Centred System, May 2011.

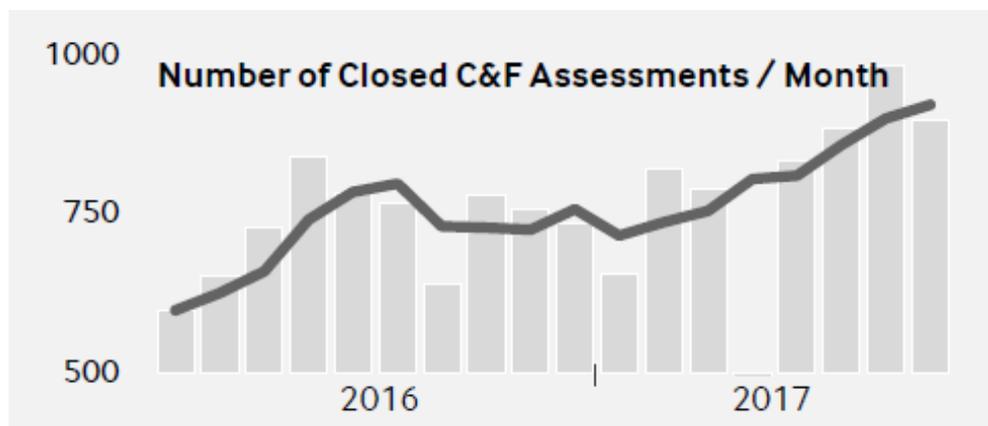
<sup>2</sup> The challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified social work staff is not unique to Nottinghamshire, with councils nationally having spent in excess of £500m on agency social workers in the last three years.

2017-18, agency spend continues to present a significant budgetary pressure on the service.

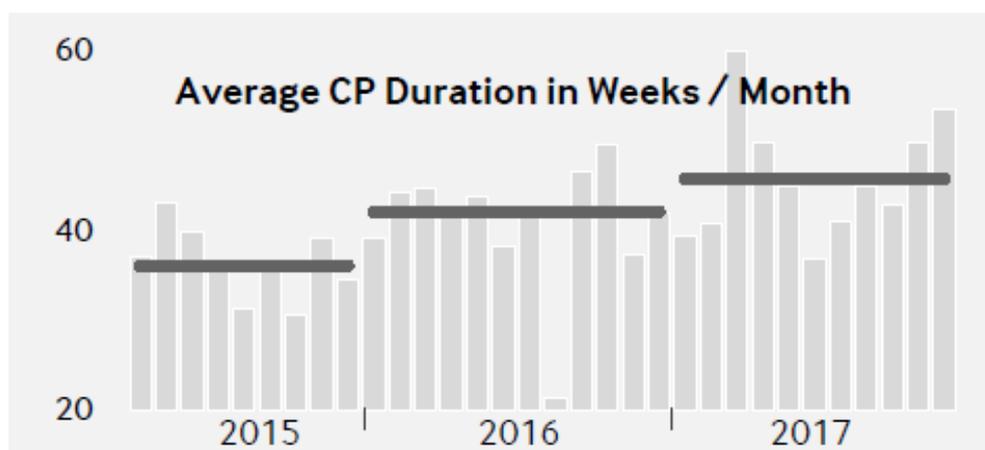
5. The SWSO programme has been running for approximately three years and is operational in the following teams: Bassetlaw District Child Protection Team (DCPT), Mansfield DCPT, Ashfield DCPT, Broxtowe & Rushcliffe DCPTs, the Looked After Children (LAC) team and the Children's Disability Service (CDS). There are currently 20.5 FTE (full-time equivalent) SWSOs and 2 FTE Senior SWSOs deployed across these social work teams.
6. The SWSO posts have proved highly beneficial in terms of social worker and service user feedback, and have also supported a reduction in staff absence, improved staff morale and reduced turnover rates as part of the children's social care recruitment and retention package.
7. A SWSO survey undertaken in autumn 2017 found that 90% of staff who work with SWSOs report a significant or very significant improvement in team morale due to SWSOs. 70% report a significant positive impact upon their own work-life balance. A number of staff also reported that SWSOs have resulted in them taking less time off work sick; between 2014/15 and 2016/17, the total number of days lost due to sickness per FTE in frontline child protection teams fell from 16.3 days per year to 11.2 days per year.
8. Feedback from staff found that SWSOs are effective and very helpful in undertaking key tasks on behalf of social workers that do not require a social work qualification, thus allowing social workers to focus their time on direct work with vulnerable children and families. This includes tasks such as gathering information from agencies, arranging contact sessions, being the first point of contact for families and agencies to answer queries, and managing diaries. 48% of survey respondents said that the availability of SWSOs in a team would be a 'significant or highly significant factor' in their decision to work in that team.
9. Whilst the reduction in agency spend and increased social worker capacity would be sufficient to fund the continuation of the SWSO posts, demands on the wider social care service have increased significantly, which has impacted on the workforce and its capacity to meet the demand:
  - a. The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has seen a 70% increase in demand since 2015, which shows no evidence of subsiding:



- b. There has been a 95% increase in caseloads in the Assessment Service since the last Ofsted inspection in 2015:



- c. The duration of child protection (CP) cases has increased by 27% since 2015:



10. Following a recent external review, work is planned on caseload progression to ensure that the increased and growing demands on the service are managed as effectively and efficiently as possible. The SWSO posts are expected to be a key role in this work.
11. In addition, the current workforce is relatively inexperienced, with many newly qualified social workers now filling social work posts that were previously being fulfilled by experienced agency workers. At present, 47% of the current social work workforce have been qualified for less than 18 months, which has significant implications on their caseload size and caseload complexity (particularly for social workers completing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment, who must have protected caseloads). As a result, further agency support has been required to support newly-qualified social workers, to ensure that the service remains safe.
12. As a result of the growing demands on the service and the relatively inexperienced workforce, it is therefore proposed that the SWSO posts are extended until 31 March 2019 to continue to support the front-line child protection teams. This would be subject to further review, following the focus on casework progression over the next year.

## **Other Options Considered**

13. The SWSO programme could cease on 31 March 2018, although staff would be subject to the relevant notice periods. However, the SWSO role is seen as a valuable post within the service, which if removed would create instability and risk disruption to the quality of the service provided. The posts help mitigate against the increased pressures on the service and will be a key part of the planned caseload progression work.

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

14. The SWSO posts are now an established part of the social work teams, which have shown many benefits and will be used as part of the work to mitigate the growth in demand on the service and ensure that caseloads are contained at a safe level.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

15. 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**

16. The cost of these posts is £0.6m and the continued funding of them will be contained within the Children & Families department overall budget for 2018-19.

## **Human Resources Implications (GME 12/01/18)**

17. A further extension to the temporary SWSO posts would mean that the staff currently in the roles will be offered an extension to their current contract in line with the Council's existing agreed employment procedures. The decision would not create any new employment liabilities for the Council.

## **Implications for Service Users**

18. The SWSO role provides increased support for Social Workers and positively impacts on the service provided to children and their families.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) That the Committee approves the extension of the temporary Social Work Support Officer posts in Children's Social Care until 31 March 2019.

**Steve Edwards**

## **Service Director, Youth, Families and Social Work**

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

Helen Lester  
Programme Manager  
T: 0115 977 4383  
E: [helen.lester@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:helen.lester@nottsc.gov.uk)

Natasha Wrzesinski  
Quality & Improvement Manager  
T: 0115 99 34648  
E: [natasha.wrzesinski@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:natasha.wrzesinski@nottsc.gov.uk)

### **Constitutional Comments (LM 17/01/18)**

19. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the contents of the report.

### **Financial Comments (SAS 22/01/18)**

20. The containment of this spend within the overall Children & Families budget will be a significant challenge for the department as the social work staffing budget is forecast to overspend by £0.5m and the department as a whole by £0.4m in the current financial year.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Children's Social Care Transformation Programme – Social Work Support Officer Pilot - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 8 December 2014.

Children's Social Care Transformation Programme – Social Work Support Officer Pilot update – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 16 November 2015.

Social Work Support Officers – Pilot Extension - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 21 March 2016.

Extension of the Social Work Support Officer programme - report to Children and Young People's Committee on 20 February 2017.

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

All.

C1084

