

16 November 2015

Agenda Item: 9

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE****CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – SOCIAL  
WORK SUPPORT OFFICER PILOT UPDATE****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the progress of the Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) pilot.

**Information and Advice****Social Work Practice and Support Pilot; Background**

2. The recruitment and retention of qualified Child Protection Social Workers is a national issue, resulting in Councils across the UK spending millions on high cost “agency” social workers.
3. Whilst Nottinghamshire use of “agency” qualified social workers is below the national average, spend on agency staff is nonetheless significant. Gross spend on agency Child Protection Social Workers in Nottinghamshire in 2014/15 was £5 million and represented approximately 17% of the Children's Social Work workforce. Some local (East Midlands) councils report agency social workers as making up over 40% of their workforce. If Nottinghamshire had 40% agency staff the total gross spend would be an estimated £9.5 million.
4. A recent report into retention of qualified social workers by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) suggests that ‘a common characteristic of...successful approaches (taken by English Authorities with a record of success) was Social Workers **having access to high-quality and flexible administrative support – an all-round trouble-shooter who gets the practical things done for families**’. The same report points out that ‘addressing levels of excessive paperwork may be a factor in reducing worker burnout’. <sup>1</sup>
5. A 2013 report from Research in Practice, ‘Social Work Recruitment and Retention’, states that one of the **‘push’ factors (factors that can result in workers leaving their current role/profession) is a ‘lack of administrative support [which] leads to inappropriate use of qualified professionals’ capacity on administrative work**’<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ipc.brookes.ac.uk/publications/index.php?absid=820> page 4

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.rip.org.uk/download/272/RiP\\_Strategic\\_Briefing\\_social\\_work\\_retention\\_web.pdf](https://www.rip.org.uk/download/272/RiP_Strategic_Briefing_social_work_retention_web.pdf) page 5

6. In Nottinghamshire, as part of a strategy to increase recruitment and retention rates in child protection social work, and therefore to reduce agency spend, a proposal was developed which explored the ways in which social workers can be supported. The Social Work Practice and Support Pilot was devised to evaluate the introduction of a new support role, Social Work Support Officer (SWSO,) for frontline social work teams. The purpose of the SWSO role is to absorb work from social workers which does not require a social work qualification, resulting in more opportunity for direct work with children and families and increased retention as social workers feel they are well-supported. A key purpose of the role is to provide a point of contact for service-users, partner agencies and other professionals.
7. A report to this Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2014 informed Members of the plan to run a six-month pilot in Children's Social Care, and requested approval in principle to fund the pilot (£206,000) from the Strategic Development Fund. The pilot has been extended to March 2016 to allow further analysis of the benefits of the SWSO role.
8. The pilot has been run across four teams: Bassetlaw District Child Protection team (DCPT), the Looked After Children (LAC) team, Children's Disability Service (CDS) frontline social work team and Broxtowe & Rushcliffe DCPTs. The pilot has run from March 2015 and is due to end in March 2016.
9. During the course of the pilot certain tasks have emerged as fundamental to the role, and provide the greatest value in terms of improved service to children and their families and increased support for social workers, as follows:
  - a. providing a first point of contact for families and partner agencies and dealing with queries
  - b. managing social work diaries and arranging meetings
  - c. analysis of business objects reports in order to track statutory timescales.
10. The pilot has been monitored on a monthly basis and evaluated across a number of data sources, both qualitative and quantitative.
11. Much of the qualitative data has been received from social workers and team managers in the pilot teams. Their experience of having support from a SWSO has been overwhelmingly positive:
  - the consensus from social workers is that their time spent on administrative tasks has reduced by between 10-20% on average, which has enabled them to spend more time on report writing and case recording
  - the SWSO role has improved workload management and the quantity of work completed within the required timescales
  - the majority of social workers feel that they have more time for direct work with families
  - social workers have reported a better work/life balance because they do not have to always, complete reports in the evening and at weekends

- having a consistent, office-based point of contact for service users and other professionals has produced a number of benefits:
  - frustration experienced by callers has decreased as they are often able to resolve queries during their call, rather than having to wait for a social worker to call them back
  - as many queries are resolved during first contact there are less repeat calls
  - social workers do not return to the office to find a significant number of emails and calls to return, which allows them to get on with other work.
- social workers have stated that they would recommend working at NCC to other social workers. One agency worker working at NCC chose to take a permanent social work role here rather than with another local authority because of the support provided by SWSOs
- a number of positive and supportive comments have been received from partners and other professionals:
  - Health colleagues have commented on how partnership working and communication has improved
  - foster carers have complimented the SWSOs as payment queries have been addressed much more quickly.

12. A selection of comments from social workers and partners is available in **Appendix 1**.
13. Quantitative data suggests improvements in the pilot teams in comparison with the non-pilot teams, although it is difficult to say how much of this improvement can be attributed to the SWSO and how much is due to other local improvement initiatives. However, where improvement has been seen in pilot teams and not evidenced in the non-pilot teams, it seems reasonable to assume that the SWSO role has had a positive impact.
14. Staff turnover: the average turnover across the pilot teams (calculated as the number of staff leaving Children's Social Care/ number of social workers in establishment) in the six months prior to the pilot was 14.4%; since the pilot has been running turnover has decreased by 5.4% to 9%.
15. Sickness absence across the pilot teams has decreased by 2.31 days per month (DPM) per team, from 12.52 DPM to 10.21 DPM.
16. There is an overall reduction of 0.75 FTE agency social workers across the pilot teams since the start of the pilot.
17. The amount of time off in lieu (TOIL) has decreased across the pilot teams.
18. Quality data has shown an improvement in the pilot teams in comparison with non-pilot teams. The table overleaf shows results of the quality assurance data for Quarter 4 in 2014/2015 and data for Quarter 1 in 2015/2016. It compares the data for each of the pilot teams for the quarter prior to the start of the social work pilot against the first quarter of the pilot implementation. This is shown as a percentage as the number of cases audited

can vary. A significant change of 5% or more is shown as either a positive change (green) or a negative change (red). The table also includes results for non-pilot District Child Protection Teams (DCPTs) as a comparison. It is clear that there has been significant improvement in quality across the pilot teams, in comparison with a decline across the non-pilot DCPTs. It is likely that some of this improvement is due to the introduction of the SWSO role as social workers have more time to spend with families and have therefore improved the quality of their practice, although it is difficult to say for certain given the limited time the pilot has been operating.

	QMF data Q4 2014/15				QMF data Q1 2015/16			
Pilot Teams	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
Bassetlaw DCPT	0%	37%	18%	46%	0%	54%	20%	26%
CDS	0%	50%	33%	17%	8%	50%	16%	25%
Broxtowe & Rushcliffe DCPT	0%	66%	9%	25%	0%	100%	0%	0%
LAC	13%	53%	14%	20%	0%	79%	17%	4%
Non- Pilot Teams								
Ashfield DCPT	0%	37%	19%	44%	0%	40%	33%	27%
Gedling DCPT	0%	50%	19%	31%	0%	50%	13%	38%
Mansfield DCPT	0%	61%	15%	23%	8%	54%	32%	8%
Newark DCPT	0%	60%	20%	20%	0%	54%	31%	15%

19. Although small quantitative improvements have been observed the pilot has not been running for sufficient time to be sure that these improvements are a direct result of increased support for social workers, and that they will continue. Data will be collated over the next five months until the end of March 2016, and it is hoped that this will show early signs of continued improvements in staff retention, quality, absence rates and morale, and a reduction in spend on agency workers. On this basis, it is proposed that a further report will be presented to Committee in March 2016, for the future determination of the SWSO role.

### Other Options Considered

20. This report is for noting only.

### Reason/s for Recommendation/s

21. This report is for noting only

### Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such

implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

## **Financial Implications**

23. Following the extension of the pilot to March 2016, the forecast cost is £437,000; the contribution from the SDF has been received with the balance of £231,000 being reflected in the Children, Families and Cultural Services budget. There is not available budget for these costs, however, removing the SWSO role could in itself have cost implications i.e. increased turnover and agency spend. The extension of the pilot will allow additional time to evaluate the benefits of the role; it is anticipated that the SWSO project will be one of the measures that will mitigate against agency spend.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That the update on the progress of the Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) pilot be noted.

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

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## **Constitutional Comments**

24. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

## **Financial Comments (SS 21/10/15)**

25. The financial implications are contained within the report at paragraph 23 above.

## **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 practice pilot – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 8 December 2014 (previously published)

Children's Social Care Transformation Programme – social work practice pilot – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 20 April 2015 (previously published)

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

All.

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