

**14 January 2019****Agenda Item: 7****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND SOCIAL  
WORK****SUPPORTING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE ASSESSMENT SERVICE****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval of the following measures to support improvements in the quality of social work practice within the Assessment Service:
  - a) a reduction of the permanent establishment of current Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts from 41 to 37 full-time equivalent (fte)
  - b) the permanent establishment of 4 fte Business Support Administrator (Grade 3) posts to be assigned to Assessment Teams North and South.

**Information**

2. In June 2018, Children and Young People's Committee approved the permanent establishment of the existing 20.5 fte Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) posts and the establishment of an additional 20.5 fte Social Work Support Officer posts.
3. In December 2018, Committee received a progress update on recruitment to these posts, and highlighted the need to hold back on recruitment to four of the SWSO posts, with a view to developing an alternative role for supporting work in the Assessment Service. This decision arose following consultation workshops held jointly between frontline safeguarding teams and Business Support. These workshops identified lessons learned and best practice from previous Social Work Support Officer deployment. Consultation between the Assessment Service and Business Support concluded that due to the rapidity of assessments, and the inferred reduced focus on family focussed practice, the Social Work Support Officer role is unsuited to the Assessment Teams.
4. The 2017 diagnostic review of Children's Services undertaken by Newton Europe recognised that the Assessment Service has seen a total caseload increase of 95% since the 2015 Good Ofsted inspection. Consequently average caseloads in the Council's Assessment Service are currently significantly higher than they should be. The Council's position on manageable caseloads is that:
  - <20 potential capacity to manage more

- 20-21 is manageable
- 22-26 is likely to be viewed as high
- >26 is high and must be reduced.

5. This is an indicative scale and there will be variations due to case complexities (i.e. sibling groups) and the experience of the worker, however the current caseloads in the frontline Assessment Teams, which are outlined in **Table 1**, exceed 20-21<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Team</b>	<b>Total current caseload for the team</b>	<b>Full-time equivalent Social Workers</b>	<b>Average current caseload per worker (fte)</b>
Assessment	927	39	24

6. If social work caseloads are too high, this has a number of potential impacts:
- a) negative impact on the quality of practice
  - b) negative impact on staff retention
  - c) negative impact on staff wellbeing
  - d) children may not be seen by a Social Worker within a timely manner of five working days
  - e) increased duration of casework due to inability to progress tasks in a timely manner
  - f) potential adverse Ofsted inspection outcome.
7. Currently Business Support provides 2 fte agency Business Support Administrators in the Assessment Team South and 2 fte in the Assessment Team North to support Social Workers with non-statutory and administrative tasks. These posts are not part of the staffing establishment. This support enables Social Workers to spend more time progressing work effectively.
8. It is proposed that 4 fte permanent Business Support Administrator (Grade 3) posts are established to undertake administrative non-statutory tasks to increase Social Worker and Team Manager capacity. This would enable Social Workers to manage their caseloads more effectively, which would offer improved progression of cases, improved practice and increased staff morale. These posts will be established within the Business Support Service within the Chief Executive's Department and be assigned to support the Assessment Service.
9. It is proposed that implementation will commence in April 2019 therefore there is no funding required for 2018/19.
10. The impact of the increase in Business Support Administrator full-time equivalents across the Assessment Teams will be measured by a range of indicators including:
- a) Social work retention, as measured through turnover
  - b) Sickness absence levels
  - c) Timeliness of children being seen by a Social Worker
  - d) Staff morale as measured through the health check
  - e) Quality of practice, as measured through case audits.

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<sup>1</sup> As at 09.11.2018

## **Other Options Considered**

11. Expanding the Social Work Support Officer rollout to the Assessment Teams would have provided some support to Social Workers, but the disparity between the Social Work Support Officer's pay scale and skillset and that of the tasks required by the Assessment Teams means this option would not represent best value for money.

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

12. The options recommended are considered to be the most cost effective way of supporting Social Workers to manage their caseloads and through this improve quality in terms of social work practice.

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

13. 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**

14. The cost of 4 fte Business Support Administrator (Grade 3) posts is £92,476 and this will be funded from the budget released by the disestablishment of 4 fte Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts, £106,976.
15. The budget for the posts will be transferred from the Children & Families Department to the Chief Executive's Department.

## **Human Resources Implications**

16. Notice would need to be given to the existing agency staff that these roles will replace. Posts will be recruited to in line with Nottinghamshire County Council's Employment Procedures.

## **Implications for Service Users**

17. Implementation of the proposals within this report will improve the quality of service to vulnerable children and young people in need of safeguarding.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That Committee:

- 1) approves the reduction of the permanent establishment of current Social Work Support Officer (Grade 4) posts from 41 to 37 full-time equivalent

- 2) approves the permanent establishment of 4 fte Business Support Administrator (Grade 3) posts within the Business Support Service to be assigned to Assessment Teams North and South.

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#### **Constitutional Comments (SLB 19/12/18)**

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

#### **Financial Comments (SAS 02/01/19)**

19. The financial implications of the report are contained within paragraphs 14 and 15 above.

#### **HR Comments (BC 20/12/18)**

20. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. The Business Support Service has been involved in the development of these proposals. The posts will be recruited to in accordance with the Council's Vacancy Control procedure.

#### **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.

Supporting improvement in Children's Social Care – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

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

All.

C1188