

7<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Agenda Item: 12

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

### **CHANGES TO THE STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT IN THE MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING HUB AND THE EARLY HELP UNIT**

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

1. To give Committee a progress update on improvement work in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Unit.
2. To seek approval for the extension of the following temporary posts for the period of one year:
  - 6 FTE Social Workers (Hay Band B)
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 3 FTE Early Help Officers (Hay Band A)
  - 1 FTE Business Systems Analyst (Hay Band C)
  - 1 FTE Business Intelligence Report Developer (Hay Band B).
3. To seek approval for the establishment of the following temporary posts for the period of one year:
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 2 FTE Senior Early Help Officers (subject to job evaluation).
4. To seek approval for an increase in the establishment of the Early Help Unit Manager (Hay Band D) role from 0.8 FTE to 1 FTE.

#### **Information**

##### **Background**

5. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub was established by Nottinghamshire County Council in 2012 and acts as the front door for new safeguarding concerns about vulnerable children and adults. It brings together representatives from Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care, Police and Health, co-located in one place to receive and respond to safeguarding concerns with virtual links to other services, such as the Probation Trust and District

Councils. Since the start of the pandemic the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub has been working in a hybrid model, with some staff home based and the remainder working together from the Piazza.

6. As reported to Children and Young People's Committee in September 2021, enquiries to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub have grown significantly since its establishment in 2012, with the number of Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub enquiries relating to children increasing by an average of 15% per annum from just under 20,000 in 2015/16 to almost 35,000 in 2020/21. Over the last year, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has placed significant pressures on staff within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, not solely due to the volume of enquiries received, but also due to the following factors:
  - the stress of working in such an intense role where pressure does not often alleviate
  - where there is limited job satisfaction as it can be difficult to see the difference that you make
  - where it is difficult to prioritise continuing professional development through training and development opportunities due to the operational pressures of the role.
7. The Early Help Unit was also established in 2012 and acts as a "front door" for Early Help Services in Nottinghamshire. Early Help Officers have several responsibilities:
  - successfully providing advice and guidance to other agencies, often preventing referrals to early help or statutory services
  - signposting referrers to other services. Advice and guidance are provided to professionals where the needs of a family would be better met by another Nottinghamshire County Council or public sector service, or by a third sector or community organisation
  - managing referrals into The Family Service (early help case management, family and parenting teams and education enforcement services), Youth Justice Service (crime prevention) and Children's Centre Services
  - responding to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub enquiries which have been stepped down to the Early Help Unit where Pathway to Provision Tier 4 threshold is not met
  - operating a duty phone line, taking calls from members of the public (usually parent/carers) in need of Early Help Services. Often issues can be resolved on the phone with the caller receiving advice and signposting to appropriate resources that will help address their enquiry. Where the threshold is met for the Council's Early Help Services then a self-referral will be taken over the phone and passed to the appropriate team.
8. Like the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, there has been a significant, sustained increase in demand on the Early Help Unit since it was established in 2012. The increase was more marked across 2020/2021 following schools reopening after the first Covid-19 lockdown, with an increase in referrals of above 50% since 2020/2021.
9. In September 2021, Children and Young People's Committee agreed the following additional staffing capacity for both the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Unit, to enable the services to effectively respond to the increase in enquiries being received, and to create development capacity required to support the services to develop and transform into a most sustainable operating model:

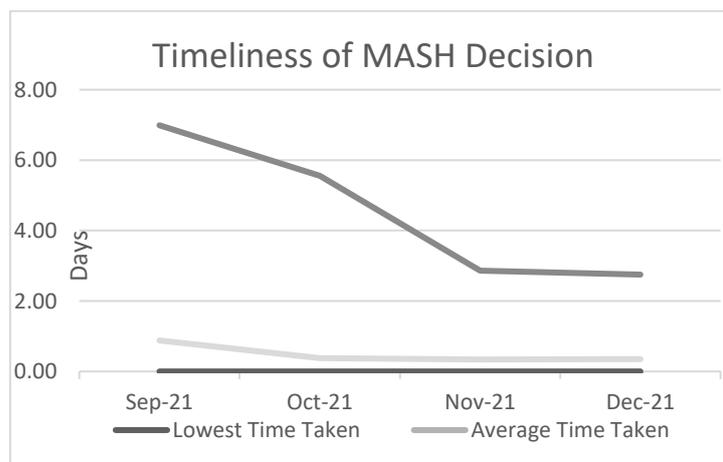
- 1 FTE Children’s Services Manager (Front Door Development) (Hay Band E)
- 2 FTE Children’s Social Work Team Managers (Hay Band D)
- 6 FTE Social Workers (Hay Band B)
- 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
- 3 FTE *Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Officers (NJE 4)*
- 3 FTE Early Help Officers (Hay Band C)
- 1 FTE Project Manager (Hay Band C)
- 1 FTE *Project Officer (Hay Band A)*
- 1 FTE Business Systems Analyst (Hay Band C)
- 1 FTE *Business Intelligence Report Developer (Hay Band B)*

10. It was noted that the capacity would be required for an initial six months, with the potential need to extend some posts further. All posts were recruited to with the exception of those highlighted in italics, where the short-term nature of the contract led to a lack of applicants. One team manager and 6 social workers were recruited as agency workers and the remainder as Council employees.

**Impact of the additional capacity**

11. In terms of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, the additional capacity has enabled the following progress to be made:

- a pod model was introduced in October 2019, involving a team manager and team of social workers overseeing Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub enquiries, with different pods rota’d on duty at different times, enabling the remaining pods to focus on information sharing and decision making. This model enables a much more streamlined approach to receiving and responding to safeguarding enquiries, with team managers having clearer oversight and accountability. The pod model has led to a significant and sustained improvement in the timeliness with which Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub enquiries are being progressed as demonstrated below:



- focussed work is taking place with the police to improve the quality of enquiries they are making to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and reduce the number of non-safeguarding enquiries. This includes joint triaging of enquiries and training for staff

- a regular Wednesday “team time” session has been introduced for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub staff, enabling focussed time for continuing professional development. This has contributed to an improvement in staff morale and wellbeing
  - a social work consultation and advice line was introduced at the beginning of February. This is intended to support professionals with concerns about a child to think through the range of support options available and determine the most appropriate response, and whether this is through Early Help or Children’s Social Care
  - a threshold panel has been introduced within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, to support reflective learning around decision making and ensure that managers feel supported with holding risk.
12. In terms of the Early Help Unit, the additional capacity created has enabled a backlog of referrals that had developed due to the sustained increase in referrals to be progressed, with new referrals now able to be assessed and progressed within 2½ weeks.
13. Further work that has been initiated to generate further improvements, but which has not yet been implemented, includes simplifying the workflow used within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub case recording system (Mosaic), integrating the online referral forms used for both the Early Help Unit and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, and improving the pathway between the Customer Services Centre, Early Help Unit and Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.

### **Practice Diagnostic**

14. In parallel with the internal improvement work, a two-day practice diagnostic of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub was completed by Essex Sector Led Improvement Partnership in November 2021. Essex is a Partner in Practice authority designated by the Department for Education, providing sector-led improvement to a range of authorities across the country. The diagnostic assessed the quality of practice within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, considered strengths and areas for development. They concluded that the practice in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub was sound, with no areas that caused concerns. They also found that staff were able to articulate the strengths-based model of practice and that this was evident in practice, that the introduction of the pod model was felt to have created consistency in threshold decision-making, improved accountability and management oversight, and that senior managers were sighted on pressure in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and being responsive to try and reduce pressure and ensure an effective, timely response to need.
15. The diagnostic identified some challenges, which they recognised were already known to Nottinghamshire, including:
- an increase in referrals to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, with significantly fewer referrals being made to the Early Help Unit
  - within this, an increase in non-safeguarding referrals and poor quality referrals
  - families presenting with more complex needs
  - pressure on practitioners in the wider partnership to refer to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
  - further work to do to develop practitioners in the wider partnership’s understanding of safeguarding.

16. The diagnostic confirmed the direction of travel already agreed in principle in Nottinghamshire, which is to move to a multi-agency, needs-led front door incorporating both early help and social care referrals, alongside providing a more focussed and coherent approach to supporting partner agencies to develop their confidence in responding to families with emerging needs.

### **Capacity requirements moving forwards**

17. There is a need to maintain operationality stability within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Unit to continue to respond effectively during a period of uncertainty in respect of the ongoing impact of the pandemic. As such, it is proposed that the following posts that were originally established on a temporary basis for six months, are extended for a further year:
  - 6 FTE Social Workers (Hay Band B)
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 3 FTE Early Help Officers (Hay Band A).
18. In addition, it has been identified that the following posts are now required for a period of one year, rather than the more senior posts that were originally necessary to implement the changes outlined at **paragraph 9**:
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 2 FTE Senior Early Help Officers (subject to job evaluation).
19. Given the growth in capacity within the Early Help Unit, there is a need to increase the management oversight on a permanent basis from 0.8 FTE to 1 FTE Early Help Unit Manager (Hay Band D).
20. The posts proposed to be established on a temporary basis are done so given the intention to design a multi-agency needs-led front door moving forwards, which will require some reconfiguration of staffing structures. This transformational change will be progressed as part of the Improving Residents Access programme and will involve full engagement and consultation with staff and recognised trade unions.
21. Project resource for the change programme will be met through the Transformation and Change Group resources, however there will be a need for additional capacity for systems change and reporting developments, to progress the work outlined in **paragraph 13**. As such it is proposed that the following posts are extended for one year:
  - 1 FTE Business Systems Analyst (Hay Band C)
  - 1 FTE Business Intelligence Report Developer (Hay Band B).

### **Other Options Considered**

22. An alternative option would be to reduce the staffing levels to the original establishment, however this capacity level would be insufficient to meet the current levels of need, and would risk a deterioration in the Council's ability to respond effectively to safeguarding referrals.

## Reason/s for Recommendation/s

23. For the Committee to understand progress made and agree the further investment needed to meet increased need and develop a more sustainable front door operating model.

## Statutory and Policy Implications

24. 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.

## Data Protection and Information Governance

25. The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) require the Council to put in place appropriate technical and organisational measures to ensure that data protection principles and individual's information rights are built into everything the Council does. Legal Services and Information Governance colleagues within the Council will provide guidance on how to progress any new initiatives described to ensure Council obligations are met.

## Financial Implications

26. A breakdown of the total costs for the required staffing is detailed below:

Post	Pay Band	Budget Requirement NCC	Agency Top up	FTE	Annual Cost NCC
Social Worker	B	£46,228	£19,690	6	£395,511
Advanced Practitioner	C	£52,591	£0	4	£210,364
Senior Early Help Officer	B*	£46,228	£0	2	£92,456
EHO's	A	£40,212	£0	3	£120,636
Business Systems Analyst	C	£52,591	£0	1	£52,591
Business Intelligence Report Developer	B	£46,228	£0	1	£46,228
Early Help Unit Manager	D	£56,417	£0	0.2	£11,283
<b>Total</b>				<b>17.2</b>	<b>£929,069</b>
Running expenses					£20,000
<b>TOTAL STAFFING COST</b>					<b>£949,069</b>

\*for indicative purposes only – this is subject to job evaluation

27. The total cost for all temporary posts is £937,786 and this will be met through the Covid-19 grant reserve. The cost of the permanent 0.2 FTE Early Help Unit Manager is £11,283 and this will be contained within the 2022/23 Youth, Families and Social Work budget of £51.845m.

## **Human Resources Implications**

28. Recruitment to posts will be undertaken in line with the Council's Human Resources procedures and with engagement as appropriate from trade unions. Due to the short time contract duration of some posts to be established there may be a need to recruit agency staff to ensure that all necessary posts are filled.

## **Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications**

29. The proposals contained within this report will further strengthen the Council's ability to safeguard vulnerable children by ensuring that the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub is able to operate effectively within the context of increasing need.

## **Implications for Service Users**

30. The proposals contained within this report will improve the quality of service received by vulnerable children and families, and referring professionals.

## **RECOMMENDATION/S**

That Committee;

- 1) approves the extension of the following temporary posts in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Early Help Unit for one year:
  - 6 FTE Social Workers (Hay Band B)
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 3 FTE Early Help Officers (Hay Band A)
  - 1 FTE Business Systems Analyst (Hay Band C)
  - 1 FTE Business Intelligence Report Developer (Hay Band B).
- 2) approves the establishment of the following posts for one year:
  - 2 FTE Advanced Practitioners (Hay Band C)
  - 2 FTE Senior Early Help Officers (subject to job evaluation).
- 3) approves an increase in the establishment of the Early Help Unit Manager (Hay Band D) post from 0.8 FTE to 1 FTE.

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

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

Lucy Peel  
Group Manager, Service Improvement  
T: 0115 9773139  
E: [lucy.peel@nottsc.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.peel@nottsc.gov.uk)

### **Constitutional Comments (LW 15/02/22)**

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

### **Financial Comments (LCD 17/02/22)**

32. The total cost for all temporary posts is £937,786 and this will be met through the Covid-19 grant reserve. The cost of the permanent 0.2 FTE Early Help Unit Manager is £11,283 and this will be contained within the 2022/23 Youth, Families and Social Work budget of £51.845m.

### **HR Comments (BC 23/02/22)**

33. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Any new posts will be recruited to in line with agreed employment and recruitment procedures. The post of Senior Early Help Officer is subject to job evaluation.

### **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.

[Changes to the staffing establishment in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Early Help Unit – report to Children and Young People's Committee on 13th September 2021](#)

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

All.

C1551