

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

To: **Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee**

Meeting Date: **19 September 2018**

From: **Sarah-Jane Smedmor
Assistant Director, Children's Services**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Purpose: **Information requested by the Committee.**

Recommendation: **To note and comment on the report.**

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Summary:

The service was asked to provide an update to the Sub-Committee about social workers, the proposed structural changes coming up in the autumn, and how we are going to ensure that social workers are trained and supported to see children and families as much as possible.

There have also been some further requests for clarification about vacancy rates amongst social workers, what we are doing about this if there is a problem, and some information about specialist recruitment programmes.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Sub-Committee is aware that, at the time of writing, the consultation is taking place which will modify the way social workers work with and support families further, building on the changes that were put in place in 2017. Every child who is open to Social Care has a social worker, but it became clear that the 'life-long units' which cover every aspect of social work from assessment to adoption, had, in some instances become overwhelmed with caseloads and the breadth of work. The new structure has a targeted, short-term assessment function to identify, target and stream work effectively, which then allows either the district teams to continue any further work needed under Child Protection or Child in Need work, or any Looked After children to be worked with in the dedicated corporate parenting service. This structure will prioritise long-term relationships between Looked After children and their worker, and the teams will be further supported by specialist adolescent teams who will support teenagers and young people on the edge of care. This means that social workers can concentrate on their strengths and skill-sets, it will allow Looked After children to have the long-term stable relationship with their worker that we know to be crucial for them, and families will move through the structure in a timely and targeted way.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 Given these changes, the Committee has asked about how staff were to be supported and trained to work in this modified structure. The Workforce Development group has been in place for some time and addresses recruitment, retention, training, well-being and professionalism of the service. As part of the Change for Children programme (CCP), a more strategic, short-term work stream is also in place to address the unique requirements of a structural change and what this will mean for social workers.
- 2.2 **Training:** There is a comprehensive training offer put in place by LGSS Workforce Development for all staff, with mandatory training for each career level, and with any specialist training (for example, training for social workers who may undertake Visually Recorded Interviews with the police) sourced as needed. Alongside this, staff can access e-learning, local training sessions put on by PQA (Partnerships and Quality Assurance), clinicians and local experts; they can access training provided by Research in Practice and Making Research Count which focuses more on research and the evidence-base around

modern social work practice, and specialist systemic training. There is also specialist teaching for newly-qualified staff in their first year of practice (ASYE – Assessed and Supported Year in Employment), awards and certificates for managers, and a developing network of Practice Champions, who are experts in a particular field (e.g. domestic abuse, sexual abuse) and who will offer advice and expertise to other workers. This system offers the training bedrock for all staff, and the courses available can be mapped for each individual.

- 2.3 In terms of the new structure, we are very clear that as part of the wider mapping exercise for how the service will work with cases and where transfer points will be for families, that each team or level of worker will have their training needs assessed and met. The CCP workforce group is heavily involved in helping analyse the specialist skills and knowledge that each team will require, and ensuring that an induction is put in place for staff that will address any training gaps that the individual worker might have in their new context.
- 2.5 To further assist staff in adapting to more specialised work, we have been embedding updated procedures, quick guides to key processes and practice standards, all of which are now in one place on the intranet – the Children's Portal. This houses all the procedures, toolkit, resources and key information that social work staff could need in one place, and regularly reviewed so that workers have access to the most up to date versions. This Portal is still being populated, but already staff feel confident that they can find what they need to help them do their jobs.
- 2.6 Alongside this, the Committee will be aware that Children's Services has been working with a team from Oxford Brookes University around how we work with Looked After Children. Whilst this piece of work has been completed and the recommendations are being assimilated by the service, Oxford Brookes have offered to provide eight days of training over the next year for all new Team Managers in their new role. This will be complemented by training that will be provided for the District and Service Managers and Heads of Service to provide consistency and support for those strata of management.
- 2.7 The Workforce Development group sent a survey out to staff earlier this year to help identify further issues that might impact on their training needs. This survey looked at issues such as where staff felt there might be a need or gaps, their preferred learning style and what preparation staff might require for the National Accreditation (NAAS) programme coming up for children's social workers next year. This has been a useful source of information to help fine-tune our planning for training and how we deliver it over the next couple of years. The Committee should note that there is a plan for the Principal Social Worker (PSW) to carry out a Social Work Health Check in early 2019. This is an annual report that many PSWs complete, it is based on 5 of the Local Government Employer Standards and looks at social workers feedback about effective workflow management, having the right tools to do the job, their views on effective service delivery. The Health Check uses information gleaned from the annual child and family social worker census carried out annually on 30th September, with the results* being shared across England by the Department for Education (DFE). The census gives a snapshot of numbers of social workers, vacancies, how long social workers have been working, etc. With this information and 'soft' information from surveys and focus groups, social workers' views and insights are fed back to the Local Authority, and managers create an action plan to address any issues. The Health Check will be written between January and April 2019 and will feed into future reports to the Sub-Committee.

- 2.8 **Caseloads.** The Social Work Health Check will give some of the information that the Committee has asked for in respect of caseloads, contact time with children and the impact of travel on workloads. We do know that Shire counties like Cambridgeshire always face the challenge of distance and travel time that say a London Borough or a unitary authority do not face. We also know that many Looked After children are placed out of county, and that this is an issue across the country. We do know these to be the sort of problems that a county like Cambridgeshire faces, and internally, the District model does keep the bulk of work closer to 'home' for social workers. In respect of travel to placements, 40% of our Looked After children are in LA foster care placements, and more are placed in Independent Fostering placements also in county or very close to county borders. Inevitably, though, for more specialist placements, children are placed further afield, and as noted, this is a national issue. We are very mindful of this impacting on contact time for workers, and under the new structure, a caseload of 15-20 is being proposed, with each caseload being carefully considered in terms of placements out of county and the impact this will have on each worker and the time they can devote to each child.
- 2.9 **Staff vacancy and agency worker rates.** At the social work census of 30 September 2017, there was a national vacancy rate of 20.6%, and there was an agency worker rate of 18.7%.
- 2.10 At the end of Q1 of 2018-19 in Cambridgeshire, despite some acute staffing issues in Cambridge City, the social work vacancy rate was 11.3% and the agency staff rate was 11.3%.
- 2.11 We are in no way complacent about our vacancy rates, which are much higher in Cambridge City in comparison to the rest of the county. To fill our vacancies, we have a short and medium term strategy in place, which has seen us reach out to, and recruit a cohort of workers from Europe and from South Africa. The immediate impacts from this will start to be felt from the autumn onwards. We are also currently working on a creative long term strategy which will very much look at 'growing our own' workforce, ensuring consistency, quality and stability. This strategy will look at routes such as Step Up and Apprenticeships (see 2.13). In the longer-term strategy we have to address what are some of the underlying issues around recruiting to Cambridge itself – we know that this is linked to the very real issues of cost of living locally and travel into Cambridge itself, particularly hampered currently by the A14 improvement scheme.
- 2.12 In the quarter April-June 2018, Children's Services had 13 new social workers start and nine leave. Of the leavers, one retired, one was dismissed (ill-health) and seven resigned. Our Human Resources (HR) system does not give any further information about individual circumstances than this.
- 2.13 The Sub-Committee asked about an initiative for social workers, similar to the 'Teach First' programme. 'Teach First' is a two-year programme that trains applicants to become fully qualified teachers whilst working in schools, and is supported by some university teaching throughout the programme. In social work, there is no direct equivalent, but a variety of options that staff can access now, and will be able to access in future. For example, children's social workers can come into the profession through the Step Up programme, where quality graduates who already are working in a professional field with children (often teachers, psychologists, etc.) undergo a rigorous assessment, then complete a 14 month

conversion Masters course to social work. Step Up runs every 2 years, so the current cohort are due to complete in early 2019, and we are already looking at our succession planning to ensure we attract this cohort to Cambridgeshire in a timely fashion. A developing route into the profession will be the social work apprenticeships, which will train to social work degree level within three years, whilst working as an alternatively qualified worker. The social work apprenticeship is still being developed, and estimates are that the first intake for this will be in September 2019 nationally.

3. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Resource Implications

None – report is for information only.

3.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

None – report is for information only.

3.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There is a risk implied in ensuring that staff are supported in their training to be able to deliver the Change for Children programme effectively and in a relatively short time-scale.

3.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

None – report is for information only.

3.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

None – report is for information only.

3.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

None – report is for information only.

3.7 Public Health Implications

None – report is for information only.

SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Source Documents	Location
*‘Children’s social work workforce 2017’ DFE, 2018	https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/681546/SFR09-2018_Main_Text.pdf