

Recruitment of Social Workers

Children's Health, Social Care and

Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee Date: 29th March 2017

Author:	Head of Service, Children, Families & Community Health
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report provides the Children's Health, Social Care and Education Committee with an update on the recruitment of social workers; an update on Government Social Work accreditation; Social Work Health Check and caseload issues.
- 1.2 A key purpose of Children's Health, Social Care and Education Overview & Scrutiny Committee is to hold Commissioners of Children's Health, Education Support, Early Help and Social Care Services to account.
- 1.3 Any Commissioner of Children's Health and Social Care Services in Swindon is required to provide information on the planning and provision of children's health and social care services within the Borough and consult with the Committee on any planned substantial changes or developments to service provision.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is recommended to:

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of this report and provide appropriate challenge and scrutiny in relation to the information it contains. It is the responsibility of the author to take forward any actions required.

- 2.2 Identify any areas that require further investigation.

3. Detail

Recruitment of Social Workers:

- 3.1 Social Workers deliver statutory responsibilities as set out in the Children Act 1989. Within the Council there are a number of social work teams, delivering specialist services to children and recruitment to these posts remain a high priority.

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- 3.2 The relentless focus on recruitment, development and retention of social workers (SW) and their managers has led to a reduction in SW Vacancies to 11% (below the national average of 14%); however, keeping the workforce vacancy rate low continues to be a challenge. Continual improvement to the recruitment and retention rates remain an area of focus.
- 3.3 Over the past 2 years 89 new SW /SW Manager posts were recruited to, with all Team Manager (TM) posts now filled and only one Assistant Team Manager vacancy. During the course of the recruitment and retention project, the following initiatives have been introduced which have had a significant impact on our recruitment achievements:
- 3.4 Development of a dedicated microsite/recruitment and induction process:
- 3.4.1 The development of the dedicated microsite has allowed the service to provide a whole range of information for potential candidates, together with videos of social workers "telling their story". This has proved a valuable resource and an excellent point of information for candidates. See link below: <http://socialworkswindon.co.uk/>
- 3.4.2 The service has also worked on robust processes and response timeframes to ensure that every applicant receives prompt responses to their enquiries; are notified whether they are shortlisted within two working days of the closing date; and interviewed within 4 weeks of their application. Close contact is also kept with successful candidates through the clearance stages and a service specific induction programme was developed to ensure that 'new starters' first few weeks in post are as informative and helpful as possible.
- 3.5 Introduction of an academy approach to NQSW's:
- A further improvement was the introduction of an academy approach to the recruitment and development of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW's) which ensures that they receive dedicated support, mentoring and coaching to help them reach the standards required for their Assessed Supported Year of Practice (ASYE). A dedicated experienced social worker is aligned to a small cohort and provides case management support, mentoring and reflective supervision to help them to achieve their full potential and deliver a quality service to children and families. Positive feedback has been received from NQSW's who have benefitted from this approach.

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3.6 Development and introduction of a Career Progression Scheme for Social Workers:

3.6.1 In order to ensure experienced social workers remain anchored in frontline social work, as opposed to progress into management roles; a career progression scheme was introduced. The national capability framework for social work was utilised to develop a career progression scheme for social work staff to enable them to be recognised, both in terms of status and salary, for the skills, knowledge and capabilities they display in their everyday roles. Career Progression Panels are held twice a year to consider applications and portfolios for Experienced and Consultant level social work. In the past 12 months, three members of staff have successfully achieved Consultant Level and 6 progressed to Experienced Social Worker. Positive feedback was received on this initiative from staff and the Service adapted the scheme through its pilot phase to reflect the views of staff.

3.7 Introduction of an Aspiring Managers Programme:

3.7.1 The Service realised the value of 'growing our own' and effective succession planning. This Programme was introduced to actively encourage and develop experienced social workers into management roles; thus leading to the successful appointment of internal candidates to three Assistant Team Manager positions. In addition, two staff who have undertaken the programme have used the learning provided by the programme to support their applications to progress to a Consultant Social Worker.

3.7.2 The Service is reviewing and refining the programme to ensure that social work staff are able to continue their professional development and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to either progress through the route to Consultant Social Worker or consider management opportunities in the future.

3.7.3 We however continue to require the assistance of agency social workers to cover vacant posts and also maternity/long term sickness to ensure that increasing caseloads are robustly addressed.

3.8 Government Social Work Accreditation:

In 2014 Sir Martin Narey made recommendations in his report of the effectiveness of the initial education of social workers. The Chief Social Worker for England (Children and Families), Isabelle Trowler, supported these recommendations. This led to the announcement of a new national assessment

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and accreditation system (NAAS) for social workers aimed at guaranteeing the practice skill of every practitioner, at every level of seniority.

- 3.9 In December 2014, following public consultations, the government published the Knowledge and Skills Statement to define specifically what is expected of social workers, working with the most vulnerable children, young people and families.
- 3.10 The National Assessment and Accreditation of Child and Family Social Workers (NAAS) will have major implications for the Social Work profession, future practice and individual social workers.
- 3.11 Frontline social workers who pass accreditation will become Approved Child and Family Practitioners. The process involves an online test, practice observation and scenario-based assessment. This has been trialled with almost 1,000 practitioners and early evidence suggests social workers fared well.
- 3.12 Similar accreditation processes are also being developed for senior social workers. Managers will obtain Practice Supervisor status. Assistant directors, or their equivalent, will be assessed and accredited as Practice Leaders.
- 3.13 Ministers believe accreditation will improve public confidence in social workers. The Government are using NAAS to evidence that a Social Worker has the knowledge and skills to carry out their statutory children's social work functions. It applies to Social Workers carrying out statutory functions in children's services only e.g. child protection, children in need, children in care, care leavers, young carers and fostering and adoption. It does not apply to Social Workers working in Adult Services.
- 3.14 It is up to the employer to decide if the practitioner has reached the required standard to achieve accreditation.
- 3.15 The system will be rolled out by 2020.
- 3.16 It provides a framework for people to enter the social work profession, develop their knowledge and skills and stay for a whole career, either as excellent practitioners or as leaders within a professional and practice based context – if that is what they wish to do. It recognises increasing levels of advanced practice even into the most senior leadership roles in the country.
- 3.17 Phase 1: 2017 – 2018, 31 Local Authorities have volunteered to go through the process of accreditation for their Social Workers and Practice Supervisors.
- 3.18 Phase 2: From 2019 – 2020, the aim will be to assess all the remaining Social Workers that carry out statutory functions.

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- 3.19 The Department for Education (DfE) will support Local Authorities to plan and prepare for the roll out. They will support Local Authorities in how to support and develop staff in advance of the assessment, how to endorse staff and release them for assessment. Also, how to support staff post assessment.
- 3.20 Social workers who do not meet the standard, and their employers, will receive a report after the assessment identifying areas for development. This will allow them to work with their employers to address the areas identified before they retake the assessment. It is proposed that the time allowed before the social worker retakes the assessment should be determined by the employer.
- 3.21 Those who narrowly fail will take a swift route to retake, in a short time period of for example three months; those who have failed by a bigger margin will require more time and support before retaking; Government will fund one retake.
- 3.22 Shortly, guidance will be provided by DfE that will serve as a resource to help employers understand the context of practice endorsement and to assist them in considering the extent to which their current practice system is conducive to post qualification development of the specialist knowledge and skills, as set out in the knowledge and skills statements.
- 3.23 It should be noted that accreditation is not mandatory - however, it is believed that OFSTED will include measures in respect of the National Assessment & Accreditation System (NAAS) as part of an inspection.
- 3.24 Next Steps: To embed the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS) by considering how the KSS will form part of existing staff development processes; ensure effective systems for observation and feedback including written analysis.

Caseload issues and Social Work Health Check and Caseload issues:

3.25 Social Work Health Check – Background and Methodology:

- 3.25.1 The social work health check is an important tool in supporting and delivering effective social work. It is a key element of the standards for employers of social work and is part of Standard 1 which covers the requirement to have a 'clear social work accountability framework'. The health check is a process for assessing practice conditions across a number of key areas.
- 3.25.2 The health check consists of a series of prompts, referred to as 'The 39 Steps', which can be responded to by the use of management reports and/or workforce data, practitioner feedback or a combination of both. The first phase of the health check in Swindon, undertaken over the period March to September 2016, focused on practitioner feedback. The second

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phase, which is currently underway, focuses on management reports and internally held data.

3.25.3 In order to minimise the impact on practitioners, feedback was only collected in those areas where this information could not be accessed via another source such as management reports or internal data.

3.25.4 Practitioner feedback was collected via team meetings using a survey comprising 15 questions covering four key areas of practice:

3.25.5 Effective workload management – caseload management, hours worked (including TOIL and annual leave) and competing priorities in relation to training and professional development.

3.25.6 Pro-active workflow management – competing priorities in relation to workload and meetings with service users and professionals, and tasks undertaken by other staff.

3.25.7 Having the right tools to do the job – having the right professional services and resources and access to appropriate office space.

3.25.8 A healthy workplace – team meetings, support and welfare, senior management and whistle blowing.

3.25.9 All practitioners working in social care services were invited to take part in the survey.

3.26 Results:

3.26.1 Overall, 59% of those eligible to take part responded to the survey.

3.26.2 Positive results were seen across a number of areas, most notably in the 'having the right tools to do the job' and 'healthy workplace' sections, where most questions were responded to favourably. Areas that were rated particularly highly included having access to the right professional services and resources (88%), regular access and contribution to team meetings (98% and 96% respectively), knowledge of senior management (91%) and knowing where to get assistance should they feel stressed (85%).

3.26.3 There were also some areas of positive feedback in other sections, for example in 'workload management', where over 80% of respondents stated they had needed to cancel training/meetings due to workload commitments never, rarely or occasionally.

3.26.4 The areas where responses were less favourable were primarily in the workload management sections. Here, 65% of respondents stated that

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they worked over their contracted hours to keep up with workload on a regular basis. A similar number stated that they had TOIL that they had yet to schedule in and 33% stated they had annual leave carried over that they had been unable to take. In terms of tasks undertaken, 67% of respondents felt that they were undertaking work that should be undertaken by support staff, with the majority of the items identified relating to administrative tasks.

3.27 Actions and Next Steps:

3.27.1 Work has already begun to address some of the issues highlighted in the practitioner feedback, in particular to address those areas where practitioners gave less favourable responses.

3.27.2 In the case of workload management, the department has implemented a caseload weighting system with the aim of ensuring all practitioners have manageable caseloads, both in terms of volume and complexity. The 2017/18 Social Worker staffing budget has been increased by £590k to provide additional resource to recruit additional social workers to be deployed in those areas where particularly high caseloads and pressures existed. This process has started and a number of newly qualified social workers are now in post.

3.27.3 With regard to the tasks undertaken by practitioners, a review of Business Support functions has been undertaken. This review considered all the work undertaken across the service and has resulted in recommendations for change to processes and allocations of work. The review is now moving to the implementation phase.

3.27.4 The next phase of the Social Work Health Check, which is currently underway, is to consider a range of management information and workforce data. This will then be combined with the practitioner feedback to complete the full Health Check.

3.28 Caseload issues

3.28.1 Manageable caseloads within Children's Social Care are vital to achieving a stable workforce and ensuring that children receive an appropriate and timely intervention where and when needed. Dedicated recruitment is supporting the reduction of caseloads to an average of approximately 15 children per social worker to enable safe, good practice and supports lower staff turnover, and ensures that a child's journey is smooth, timely and achieves the correct outcomes.

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3.28.2 High caseloads contribute to poor and inconsistent social work practice and are a barrier to sustaining progress. In addition, they prevent continuous improvement of the service.

3.28.3 At the end of December 2016, the average caseload for a social worker within the long terms social work teams, were approximately 18 – 22 children per social worker. It should however be noted that newly qualified social workers have a protected case load, with no complicated child protection matters allocated to them. This therefore increase the caseloads for other more experienced social workers.

4. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 4.1 The service pressure remains in relation to additional staffing costs. Workload demands have necessitated the use of agency social care staff across the service to support sick leave and maternity cover.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 4.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended) requires every Local Authority to establish an overview and scrutiny function to hold the Executive to account.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 4.3 There are no other direct implications arising as a result of this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 4.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) is required at this stage as this report proposes no changes to services. Any DIA that is required during a review of topics included within the work programme, will be identified at the appropriate stage.

Risk Management

- 4.5 No risk management issues have been identified at this stage. Any risk management issues will be identified at the appropriate time when a topic is under review by the Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

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5. Consultees

- 5.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

6. Background Papers

- 6.1 None

7. Appendices

- 7.1 None