

Social Work Update

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21st March 2018

Author:	Quality Assurance and Review Service Manager and Principal Social Worker, 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 progress in the quality of social work, feedback from the Principal Social Worker and an update regarding the Social Work Health Check.
- 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:

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. Recruitment and Retention

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.

- 3.1 The relentless focus on recruitment, development and retention of social workers (SW) and their managers has led to a stable reduction since March 2017 – current Vacancy rate sits at 17% (inclusive of investment posts) without investment posts the rate sits at 10% (below the national average of 17%); 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.

Social Work Update

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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- 3.2 Over the past 3 years 101 new SW /SW Manager posts were recruited to, with only one Team Manager (TM) post 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.
 - 3.3 A more robust "One Childrens Service Workforce Strategy" has been developed which is delivered via the Workforce Development Group and this in turn is monitored by the Projects and Priorities Board.
 - 3.4 The strategy has three key priorities:
 - 3.5 Attract and recruit high quality staff;
 - 3.6 Develop and embed a culture of strong leadership and development and
 - 3.7 A strong stable and effective workforce.
 - 3.8 This strategy is being underpinned by a Delivery Plan for 2017-2020 and is closely aligned to the Childrens Services Business Plan and the Service Improvement priorities.
 - 3.9 In terms of current staffing levels, as at the end of February there was 25 social work vacancies at a rate of 17% against establishment. These posts are across social work, managers, IRO's and service managers. At this time these vacancies are covered by agency staff.
 - 3.10 The requirement to reduce social work caseloads to between 15-18 children, a nationally acceptable level, has been approved and resources to start the recruitment campaign are being progressed. This recruitment is taking place in a nationally challenged competitive market, where a shortage of social workers is evident. Swindon Borough Council is part of the South West Memorandum of Cooperation which is joining a number of Local Authorities to all work together to address some of these challenges in the region.
 - 3.11 The Voice of Social Workers in Swindon:
 - 3.12 A number of channels are used to elicit the voice of frontline practitioners in Swindon Borough Council through the Principal Social Worker; the staff engagement sessions held by the DCS and the Social Work Health Check.
 - 3.13 The Principal Social Worker (PSW) in Swindon continues to be incorporated into the role of the Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Review Service.
 - 3.14 The Principal Social Work function is delivered through the Principal Social Work Board which is made up of experienced and consultant practitioners from across the Children's Service.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Maria Young, 01793 463268, myoung@swindon.gov.uk.

Social Work Update

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21st March 2018

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- 3.15 Appendix 1 of this report provides the most recent Principal Social Work Report, including a number of Good Practice Story Boards (appendix 2) and the response by the Head of Service to What you told us needs to change report (appendix 3).
- 3.16 The voice of the frontline practitioners is fed through from the teams by the Principal Social Work Board members. This voice is captured within this 6 monthly report which in turn is shared to provide the Director of Children Services, Head of Service and Lead Member an update on the Principal Social Work Role for children's social care over the last six months and the view from social workers about their experience of being employed within Swindon Borough Council. It is also shared with the LSCB and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.17 This is the second Principal Social Worker's 6 Monthly Report. A "What you told us v what we did" style report was developed with the Head of Service following the first report, in response to the issues that were raised. This was shared across the service via the Quarterly Quality Assurance Board for Children Families and Community Health; with the Council Lead Member for Children and with the LSCB. It received very positive responses and feedback from all these different audiences. A similar process has been in place for this second report.
- 3.18 The second channel is the Director of Children's Services has developed quarterly staff engagement sessions which are mandatory for all staff. The purpose of these sessions is to provide practitioners the opportunity to engage with the Director; to communicate the priorities and areas of development including the achievements and to seek the staffs views and contribution to developing the whole service. There is now a clear vision and mantra which all staff have agreed to "**One Swindon Service- Consistently Good Everyday**".
- 3.19 Feedback from staff regarding these sessions has been very positive and they are reporting a more inclusive, leadership style of high support and high challenge which has fostered a more transparent and open approach. The priorities for the improvement journey have been agreed as part of this engagement and the impact is a stronger ownership of our improvement journey.
- 3.20 The priorities which the Principal Social Work Report and the staff engagement sessions have identified are reflective in the updated Children Families and Community Health Business Plan. It is positive to note that the both channels highlighted the same priorities which were already recognised and confirm that there is a clear understanding of where we are in our improvement journey.
- 3.21 The third channel of social work feedback is through the Social Work Health Check. 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
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Social Work Update

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 21st March 2018

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.

- 3.22 Practitioner feedback is collected via team meetings using a survey comprising 15 questions covering four key areas of practice:
- 3.23 Effective workload management – caseload management, hours worked (including TOIL and annual leave) and competing priorities in relation to training and professional development.
- 3.24 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 Having the right tools to do the job – having the right professional services and resources and access to appropriate office space.
- 3.26 A healthy workplace – team meetings, support and welfare, senior management and whistle blowing.
- 3.27 All practitioners working in social care services were invited to take part in the survey.
- 3.28 This survey is currently being rolled out across the service during March 2018 and its findings will be presented to the Quality Assurance Performance and Improvement Board.
- 3.29 Improving Social Work Practice
- 3.30 In order to embed the “leadership grip” and ownership of the quality of service which children and their families receive from Swindon Borough Council the Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board has moved from quarterly to monthly meetings.
- 3.31 The analysis of performance information, learning from Serious Case Reviews and audits as well as the Ofsted 2014 improvement plan has identified 16 key practice improvement areas which are now underpinned by a Social Work Practice Improvement Plan.
- 3.32 Each team presents their own Performance Summary and Self-assessment, along with a team scorecard reflecting what management steps will be taken to improve the practice priorities within their team, setting their own target and trajectory for “getting to good” as well as identifying the impact and outcome for children.

Social Work Update

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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- 3.33 One of the key challenges for the service is the current ICS system which is the electronic file system for all children. It was one of the areas for improvement in the Ofsted 2014 Inspection Report and while work has concentrated on improving the system and procuring an upgrade this remains one of the most focused corporate priorities.
- 3.34 The challenge of the current ICS systems is being confirmed through the monthly Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Board which is concentrating also on the validity of the information the system can provide and level of training that social workers and managers are required to have to be competent and consistent in their recording of key performance information. In the current climate of staff "churn" this is an ongoing challenge.
- 3.35 There have been three of the new Boards to date and it is clear that the service now knows what is required and what needs to change. There is strong commitment from managers in embracing this new performance culture. It is positive to note that this detailed oversight and scrutiny is ensuring that we focus on the correct priorities, embed the routine required to improve, and monitor the practice to show a consistent and sustainable change. The impact for children means that they will receive a good consistent service across all teams. This culture change and the clear investment which the managers have demonstrated is to be congratulated especially at a time of increased demand across the service. There is now clarity regarding what service we provide and what is required for the service to improve.
- 3.36 There are conversations starting with partner agencies especially schools, which have been welcomed, to share ownership of the improvement journey and to strengthen the ethos that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, so that we can develop confidence that all interventions in children's lives ensure they receive the correct service at the right time in their life.
- 3.37 These conversations are now being focused through the new Strategic Children's Services Delivery Group which the Director of Children's services has established and chairs.
- 3.38 Troubled Families Programme
- 3.39 We have had a social worker seconded to work as part of the Troubled Families Task Force team since October 2017
- 3.40 They have concentrated on ensuring that all staff and managers in social care teams understand the Troubled Families Programme and how to link with the Swindon Borough Council taskforce to get help with specific aspects of outcomes such as worklessness
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Social Work Update

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

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- 3.41 They have identified that much of the evidence that would support claims is within the memo/ notes of the social care records or children's files and so difficult to access. The taskforce team now have two workers who have access to the ICS records in order that they can help staff to identify families where the evidence suggests the family have met outcomes. This has helped improve the number of families working with social care we have successfully claimed for. However, we need more systems based solutions to reduce the amount of time this current process takes.
- 3.42 The social worker has also worked with social care managers and the information and performance team to ensure that the families identified as being Troubled Families are added to their weekly score card so they can ensure that conversations are taking place about the wider determinants of transformational, whole family working such as addressing adult worklessness etc. The Troubled Families task force team can support this work with frontline staff to engage help and support if needed.
- 3.43 The outcome so far of this work is of better awareness and more calls from social workers to the Troubled Families taskforce, understanding of the systems issues we need to address to improve claims and more claims actually identified for submission. We need to identify Troubled Families champions within social care teams to continue the work

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 vacancies, 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.

Social Work Update

Children's Health, Social Care and Education

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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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.

5. Consultees

- 5.1 The Director of Finance (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 Appendix 1 - R20 - Principal Social Worker 6 Monthly Report June 2017.
- 7.2 Appendix 2 - R20 - PSW Report - What you told us needs to change November 2017