
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

30 June 2015

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Executive Director of People

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title: Role of the Principal Social Worker for Children's Services

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

Professor Eileen Munro's Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A Child-centred System (2011) recommended that *'Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who can report the views and experiences of the front-line to all levels of management'*. (Recommendation 14: page 14, 2011).

Following this recommendation, two Chief Social Workers were appointed at central government level in July 2014. They stated that Principal Social Workers were *'effective system changers... challenging the status quo and leading change to improve the lives of children, adults and families.'* This report outlines the role of the Principal Social Worker, who was appointed in December 2014 and who has a vital role in developing, co-ordinating and representing the views and experiences of front-line social workers to the Executive Director People.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is requested to note the introduction of the Principal Social Worker role and the key changes that have taken place since the Principal Social Worker took up her duties in December 2014 and to make any recommendations in relation to this role.

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

Munro, E. (2011) *The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report: A Child-centred System*, Norwich: The Stationary Office.

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: The Role of the Principal Social Worker – Children’s Services

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 Professor Eileen Munro’s review of child protection in England recommended that local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice.
- 1.2 The Principal Social Worker (PSW) has a vital role in developing, co-ordinating and representing the views of front-line social workers to the Executive Director People. A PSW was appointed by the City Council on 1st December 2014.
- 1.3 There are a number of duties attached to the role of the PSW. This report picks out the main themes and provides snapshots of developments so far.
- 1.4 The overall responsibility of the PSW is to provide leadership and professional support to social workers and be responsible for the development and promotion of best social work practice. The PSW works directly with front-line social workers and the Workforce Development Team to ensure that strategies and programmes for learning and development are in place to support and deliver quality social work practice. Some of this delivery is undertaken by the PSW. Since taking up the post in December 2014, the PSW has instigated monthly workshops for all senior practitioners across the service. The workshops cover a wide range of social work topics and the senior practitioners are encouraged to share this learning with colleagues in their clusters and teams. This approach has resulted in greater clarity and understanding of the role of the senior practitioner and provided them with space within the service to model good practice and engage in co-working with less experienced social workers. The PSW also organises and facilitates monthly lunchtime seminars, which are reflective spaces for practitioners across the service to discuss practice issues. Recently, a reflective tool was introduced, called the ‘journal club’. Practitioners who engaged in these workshops were invited to read a piece of research by Research in Practice on ‘That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence’. They had to apply the research findings to a case study and in small groups identify how they would use this learning within their service areas, individually or as a team. A number of learning needs for the group emerged as part of this reflective workshop and these have been picked up and acted upon by the PSW and the service managers.
- 1.5 Another key aspect of the role is to support the development of a career pathway for social workers in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), initiated by the Social Work Reform Board and now the responsibility of the College of Social Work, and the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS), introduced last year by the Department for Education. Since being in post the PSW has developed an in-house Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme. The Programme will result in quicker identification of good or poor practice and provide the service with robust data about Newly Qualified Social Workers’ practice and the support and supervision they receive from their line managers. After successful completion of the ASYE Programme, social workers undertake four workshops as part of the Early Professional Development (EPD) Programme to prepare them for moving from a grade 6 social work post to a grade 7 experienced social worker post. The reinstatement of the EPD Programme is an essential element in assisting with the retention of experienced practitioners. A progression panel, chaired by the PSW, decides whether a practitioner has met the requirements of the PCF at experienced social worker level.

- 1.6 An essential element of the role is to support the development of policies, procedures and practice guidance relating to social work practice. The PSW has recently reviewed and updated the recording and supervision policies to make them more accessible and reflective. The PSW has been part of a Research in Practice change project, involving 12 local authorities, on embedding reflective supervision, sharing reflective supervision tools and considering the best ways of recording reflective practice. This project is currently being written up by Research in Practice and will be disseminated to a large number of local authorities. Reflective supervision is crucial in ensuring that practitioners are supported to engage in good social work practice, including seeing and listening to children and young people, and in identifying poor performance at an early stage. To assist team managers and senior practitioners to utilise evidence-based research and reading, the PSW (together with the PSW-adults) is currently in the process of developing a web-based resource library with help from staff in the Resources Directorate.
- 1.7 The role also requires the PSW to act as a 'critical friend' to higher management in Children's Services and provide independent constructive challenge. The PSW has regular meetings with the Executive Director, Assistant Director and Heads of Service to identify any difficulties and propose possible solutions. This direct relationship with higher management is very important in providing some assurance to practitioners that their views are being listened and responded to.
- 1.8 The PSW's working relationship with the Voice of Care group has been extremely valuable. The City Council has implemented a dedicated 'voice of the child' case note on Protocol (the IT recording system used by social work practitioners) and there are a number of plans to involve young people and children in workshops, training and the assessment of Newly Qualified Social Workers' portfolios.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member is requested to note the introduction of the Principal Social Worker role and the key changes that have taken place since the Principal Social Worker took up her duties in December 2014 and to make any recommendations in relation to this role.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

- 3.1 Not applicable

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

- 4.1 There are no decisions to be implemented as a direct result of this report.

5. Comments from Executive Director of Resources

- 5.1 Financial implications

The Principal Social Worker post has been funded from the additional £10M budget for Children's Social Care in 2015/16.

- 5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. Other implications

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

The Principal Social Worker has a key role in the Children's Improvement Board Plan to improve the quality and consistency of social work practice within the City, thus ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded and able to achieve positive outcomes.

6.2 How is risk being managed?

Not applicable

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

Improving the quality and consistency of social work practice; assisting Workforce Development to develop a career pathway; supporting the retention of social workers; working with the Principal Social Worker (Adults) on shared issues; being a critical friend to higher management.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

A key component of the Principal Social Worker role is ensuring that social work practice addresses inequalities in relation to social divisions (age, class, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality).

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

Not applicable

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

The Principal Social Worker has links with a number of partner organisations to assist in the development of social work education and practice in ways that are responsive to the needs of the service, for example, NSPCC, Coventry University and University of Warwick.

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