



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board

Date: 27 April 2017

Subject: Improving the Quality and Performance of Social Workers

1 Purpose of the Note

1.1 This note outlines the support, high expectation and challenge to Front Line Social Workers who provide direct intervention and services to children, young people, their families and carers. Coventry's Children's Services Social Workers provide early help and protection for children who are in need, or Children Looked After, Children placed for adoption and Young People who are preparing to leave care. Social Workers within the fostering service provide direct assessment and family placement services to foster carers.

2 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board:

- 1) Consider the information presented and note the progress made to date.
- 2) Identify any recommendations to the appropriate Cabinet Member.
- 3) Receive a further progress report in October 2017

3 Background/Information

3.1 Recruitment Strategy

Over the last 12 months the relentless focus on Social Work recruitment activity through direct advertising campaigns such as "**We are with You**" and related Social Media activity has led to substantial permanent appointments.

3.2 Coventry is now viewed as a forward thinking and progressive employer for Children and Families Social Workers in the West Midlands Region. This is evidenced in the recent national Compass recruitment jobs fair, where Coventry was successful in shortlisting 60 practitioners who have expressed an interest in applying for current vacancies.

3.3 Central to the recruitment strategy has been the need to ensure that our selection and interview process has been strengthened to ensure that Coventry attracts talented and competent social workers.

3.4 HR services undertook a review of the impact of the recruitment process in 2016, at the request of the Director for Children's Services. The review concluded that a move to an assessment centre model would provide a more systematic approach to selection through the use of different assessment approaches, rather than just solely relying on an interview. Plans are in place for the launch of an assessment centre model in June 2017.

3.5 Social Work Pathway

Children's services has launched the Aspiring to Social Work Pathway - this is a programme aimed at providing opportunities for non-social work qualified staff to apply for Social Work training with the Open University. Recruitment to this programme has commenced, up to 8 places will be offered.

3.6 Furthermore, the council is also a member of the West Midlands Step up to Social Work programme. This provides a fast-track post graduate pathway to qualifying as a Children and Families Social Worker, and this scheme is funded by the Department for Education. Recruitment to this programme has commenced with Coventry receiving 6 fully-funded places.

3.7 Social Work Academy

Children's Services will be launching the Social Work Academy in September 2017. This will have a relentless focus on the retention of social workers through support and targeted continuous professional development pathways. The academy will include a student unit which will take up to 20 social work students a year on practice placements from both Coventry and Warwick University, Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) programme, and Experienced Social Worker/Senior/Advanced Practitioner progression scheme.

3.8 Social Work Teaching Partnership

Teaching Partnerships are a government initiative aimed at driving improvement in Social Work education through a greater emphasis on closer employer and university partnership working. Coventry is a member of the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership with 9 other regional Local Authorities and Birmingham University.

3.9 Social Work Accreditation

The Department for Education and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families will be launching the Approved Children and Families Social Worker Programme. This programme will require qualified Social Workers to meet a level of competency and capability in order to continue to practice as approved children and families' social workers. It is anticipated that all social workers in statutory settings will need to be approved by 2020.

3.10 Coventry is well placed to meet the requirements of this programme, briefings have been held for social workers and their managers. The DfE are due to publish their final recommendations on this scheme in June 2017.

3.11 Performance of Social Workers

The Director of Children's Services and the Senior Leadership team have revised the quality assurance and audit framework. This will be implemented in April 2017.

3.12 This framework will promote continuous improvement in the quality and consistency of Social Work practice and drive a more outcome-focussed approach for children and young people. An essential element of the revised framework is ensuring that the learning from audit and quality assurance activity is shared with social workers and their managers to promote learning, reflection and practice improvement.

3.13 Supervision

The revised Supervision Framework will continue to promote professional learning, support and management oversight, and decision making with children and young people and their families. Frequency of Supervision is monitored through the Performance Dashboard and is reported on a monthly basis.

3.14 Performance Management Review and Appraisal

Children's Services Leadership team will ensure that all Social Workers and Practitioners have the opportunity to receive a performance management review, this appraisal will promote the council's core and additional behaviour framework. Where poor performance is identified a clear action plan will be implemented which will address the issues.

4 Management of Poor Performance

4.1 The Capability Procedure is central to ensuring that poor performance is identified early and that appropriate support and supervision is offered by managers to ensure staff have the opportunity to address the issues that have been raised.

4.2 Over the last 12 months, HR records indicate there were 4 cases in Children's Services of the formal capability procedure being used, 2 of the cases were resolved through an improvement in performance, and the remaining cases were resolved through dismissal and resignation.

Authors:

Lee Pardy-McLaughlin, Principal Social Worker

John Gregg, Director of Children's Services

Contact details: john.gregg@coventry.gov.uk
Lee.pardy-mclaughlin@coventry.gov.uk

Tel: (024) 7683 3402

Tel: (024) 7678 7375

