



To: **Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board**

12 October 2017

Subject: Improving the Quality and Performance of Social Workers

1 Purpose of the Note

1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the progress that Coventry Children's Services have made in improving the quality and performance of Social Workers who 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 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:

- 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 February 2018

3 Background/Information

4 Recruitment Strategy

4.1 Coventry has continued to have a robust recruitment process that has been specifically targeted at recruiting experienced children and families' social workers. Through the "We are with You" campaign this has included advertising in national and local media, and attendance at key Social Work recruitment fairs. This has led to a reduction in the number of agency social workers, and appointments to permanent posts across the services. The agency rate is currently 15%, compared with 26% in April 2016.

4.2 Assessment Centre model for the recruitment of Social Workers using a range of recruitment approaches that includes written and diagnostic assessment, Young People's panel and technical interview is presently being piloted to enable Children's Services to appoint high calibre and experienced social workers.

5 Social Work Pathway

5.1 Children's Services launched the Aspiring to Social Work programme in partnership with the Open University. This is a bespoke pathway for children and families workers to study for a Degree in Social Work. Following a rigorous recruitment and selection process 7 staff have been offered places on the programme that is due to commence in October 2017.

- 5.2 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, this scheme is funded by the Department for Education (DfE). Recruitment to this programme was completed in June 2017 with Coventry receiving 6 fully-funded places. The programme commences in January 2018. It is expected that this programme will have a further cohort to be announced by the DfE in summer 2018.
- 5.3 The Director of Children's Services and the Senior Leadership Team have been in discussion with the Frontline Social Work programme. This is a fast track national post graduate pathway that is fully funded by the DfE. It is expected that Coventry Children's Services will be invited to join this programme following further discussion and agreement. This will provide up to 6 post graduate trainee places.
- 5.4 Children's Services continues to offer practice learning placements to Social Work students from Warwick and Coventry Universities through the Practice Education pathway. The development of the Social Work Student unit in 2017 has been well regarded and has supported students in their learning and professional development. This provides a gateway for students to apply for Newly Qualified Social Work posts at the end of their final placements.

6 Social Work Academy

- 6.1 In its paper "Children's Social Care Reform – A vision for change" published in January 2016 the DfE describes social work as 'the profession which bears the heaviest burden of responsibility.'
- 6.2 It describes aims which are also reflected in our Coventry Social Worker vision and are implicit in achieving our service outcomes: 'the professional judgement of social workers is deeply respected, frequently sought and trusted. Social Workers know how to effect change within families but also know when success can be achieved. They know how to help young people rebuild their social world and leaves the cares system brave, hopeful and equipped for the adult world.'
- 6.3 This involves 'bringing the best people into the profession and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the incredibly challenging but hugely rewarding work we expect them to do and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice and excellence.'
- 6.4 Children's Services will be launching the Social Work Academy in October 2017. This will have a relentless focus on the retention of social workers through support and targeted continuous professional development pathways. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) will spend the first 6 months of their first year in practice located in the academy team, supported by an experienced team manager and social workers who will work directly with NQSW's through joint case work and direct work with children and their families to build the confidence, skills and knowledge.
- 6.5 The Academy will take the lead in the delivery of social work practice education supporting the continuing recruitment, retention and development of social workers, including those who want to develop as practice educators.
- 6.6 Recruitment to the Team Manager and Experienced Social Worker posts in the Academy have been offered as internal secondments.

7 Social Work Teaching Partnership

- 7.1 Coventry is a member of the West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership, this partnership consists of 10 other Local Authorities in the West Midlands and Birmingham

University. The focus of the partnership is to develop and grow the skills and knowledge of children and families social workers through a range of initiatives that include:

- Access to Research
- Master Classes with leading Children's Services Academics
- Post Qualifying Formal Programmes for Experienced Social Workers

7.2 Children's Services held a Practice Development week in June 2017 which included a range of learning and development workshops facilitated by leading academics and research in practice partners. The events were attended by 300 front line staff from the People Directorate and evaluated well.

8 Social Work Accreditation

8.1 The Department for Education and the Chief Social Worker for Children and Families launched the National Assessment and Accreditation Programme for Children and Families Social Worker in July 2017. This programme will require qualified Social Workers to meet a level of knowledge and skills 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. Further announcements from government are expected in autumn 2017 on the implementation of the programme.

9 Performance of Social Workers

9.1 The Director of Children's Services and the Senior Leadership team revised the quality assurance and audit framework. This was implemented in April 2017. Learning from audits and quality assurance is being embedded through regular practice improvement forums for managers and practitioners, these workshops are held monthly and promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

9.2 Good feedback from Children and Families courts recognises that social worker reports are improving. When a social worker writes a report it is quality assured and reviewed by the legal planning team. The service recognise more work needs to be undertaken and this will be addressed through workforce planning to commission further learning and development training. Our Learning and Development Offer currently includes court skills training.

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