
Cabinet Member Children and Young People

16 April 2018

Name of Cabinet Member:

Children and Young People – Councillor E Ruane

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Director of Children's Services

Ward(s) affected:

None

Title:

Recommendations from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) Task and Finish Group on the Retention of Social Workers

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

At their meeting on 29th June 2017 the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider the issues and details around the retention of social workers arising from an item on the Ofsted report. The Members met 4 times, as well as holding two focus groups with social workers.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member is requested to:

- 1) Consider the recommendations agreed by the Education and Children's Scrutiny Board (2) at their meeting on 27th March 2018. The agreed recommendations were as follows:

The Education and Children's Scrutiny Board are recommended to:

- a. Write to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in support of the proposed career progressions scheme for social workers and the removal of the market supplement for specific social workers
- b. Receive a report on implementation of the progression scheme in September 2018, including details of numbers of staff leaving due to the removal of the market supplement and any associated agency costs.
- c. Receive an annual report on exit interview data and Member focus groups with social workers.
- d. Request that:
 - i. The Director of Children's Services ensure that members of the Children's Senior Leadership Team communicate with front line staff face to face on a regular basis.

- ii. The Director of Project Management and Property Services, through the planned refurbishment of Broadgate House, ensure that Social Workers have sufficient equipment, desk space and private meeting space to carry out their roles effectively.
 - iii. The Director of Customer Service and Transformation give consideration to the provision of specialist administrative support to Social Work teams.
- e. Formally thank officers for the progress they have recently made on the improvement journey

List of Appendices included:

Appendix 1: Scoping Document

Appendix 2: Social Work Research by the Teaching Partnership at Birmingham University

Appendix 3: Financial information

Appendix 4: Workforce Strategy and exit interview information

Background papers:

None

Other useful documents

Briefing note which went to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) on 29th March 2018

<http://moderngov.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s37635/BN%20Recommendations%20Social%20Worker%20TF%20final.pdf>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No – but a briefing note with recommendations from the task and finish group went to the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) – 29 March 2018

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: Recommendations from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)
Task and Finish Group on the Retention of Social Workers

1 Context (or background)

- 1.1 At their meeting on 29th June 2017 the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider the issues and details around the retention of social workers arising from an item on the Ofsted report.
- 1.2 The members of the task and finish group were agreed to be:
 - Councillor Lepoidevin
 - Councillor Lucas
 - Councillor Male
 - Councillor Miks
 - Councillor Mal Mutton (Chair)
 - Councillor Seaman
- 1.3 The Members met 4 times, as well as holding two focus groups with social workers.

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

Scope and context

- 2.1 Members agreed and amended the scope attached at Appendix 1. Members discussed the Workforce Strategy, what works in other areas and information about the proposed progression scheme for social workers.
- 2.2 The Children's Workforce Strategy is seen as a driving force for improvement led by the principal social worker and the director of children's services. Officers had identified that career progression for social workers was lacking in Coventry, so, as a response have developed the social work academy, progression scheme and are creating the conditions for good social work to flourish such as good supervision, the right culture, pay, and manageable caseloads, on which there have been challenges.
- 2.3 They have had successes in terms of newly qualified social workers but their main issue is the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers. They are developing a post qualifying pathway with Coventry University, and creating manageable caseloads which the redesign of children's services will support.
- 2.4 Members heard that the senior management team is now stable but changes that have been made over the last three years will not yet be having an impact on the outcomes for children. This will take time, maybe five years. Ofsted have judged that Children's Services require improvement but could recognise that there is the capacity at a senior management and political level to make this happen.
- 2.5 Members were given an overview of the draft progression scheme currently being developed. The proposal is to introduce an advanced social worker grade, which enables progression, without moving into management and keeping good experienced social workers in front-line practice.
- 2.6 Members requested further financial information on the costs of the advanced social worker grade alongside the market supplement that was offered to some social workers and the effect of withdrawing the supplement.

3 What works to retain social workers in practice

- 3.1 Members discussed the implications of the £5,000 market supplement and the proposed removal in detail.

- 3.2 Members heard that 43 existing social workers were receiving the supplement out of a work force of 303. The supplement was only available to specialist child protection social workers and had, in effect, created a two-tier workforce as not all social workers were eligible for the top-up.
- 3.3 These social workers would be encouraged to apply for the advanced social worker roles which will be open to all staff. The pay grade for successfully achieving the advanced social worker role will be comparable to the market supplement.
- 3.4 Members raised concerns about informing those social workers who would be losing the supplement and also about those social worker who don't meet the requirements for the advanced social worker role.
- 3.5 Members were assured that any competency issues would be addressed. Senior officers and unions had been briefed on the proposed changes, however the 43 affected hadn't directly been informed at this time.
- 3.6 Members were broadly in favour of the changes as they address disparities in salary and also provide career progression for social work practitioners.
- 3.7 Members also considered the findings from a study by the social work research teaching partnership at Birmingham University into retention of social workers (Appendix 2). The key findings were that money is not the primary factor for social workers staying with a local authority. Other more important factors are being valued by the organisation, case load level and career progression.

4 Social Worker Focus Groups

- 4.1 14 social workers were able to feed in their views and comments on the issue of what would make their jobs more manageable, what would make them stay with Coventry, what would make them consider leaving.
- 4.2 Social workers from across various different service areas were represented, as well as different number of years in service. There were some social workers who were still within their post-qualifying period and some who had been with the Coventry for more than 10 years. There were also some experienced social workers who were new to Coventry.
- 4.3 Members started by asking the social workers how they had been recruited to Coventry and the induction that was offered. They were also asked about how Coventry compares to other organisations they have worked for.
- 4.4 Other areas of questioning included:
 - The impact of the redesign of children services
 - The quality of the training offer
 - Support from managers
 - Communication within the service
 - Flexible working and work/life balance
 - What is the one thing that needs to be improved
 - The requirements to become a "good" authority
 - Where they see themselves in 2,5 and 10 years' time
- 4.5 The key issues raised by staff were:
 - 4.5.1 What was working well
 - Training has improved, especially mix of in house and external training - Signs of Safety was specifically mentioned as good training
 - Induction period for newer recruits has improved compared to people in post for longer - possibility of a mentor or buddy for new staff to build confidence
 - Interview process involving children and young people

- Friendly place to work
- Respectful relationships - need time to rebuild these after the restructure
- Teams with stable managers seem to be where the restructure is settling in
- Expectations in practice, especially timeliness and record keeping are higher
- Flexi working enables work/life balance
- All staff were aware of the requirements for a journey to get to good
- The training and opportunities seem promising but those promises need to be kept.
- Signs of Safety was supported as an approach to child protection casework

4.5.2 Areas for improvement

- Caseloads need to be manageable – this was the one thing that would improve their working life
- Middle management needs to be stable and consistent
- Communication with front line staff about rationale behind required changes in practice from management
- Market supplement is divisive and seen as unequal, that some jobs are valued more than others
- Those currently receiving the market supplement may leave with a drop in income - mortgages and families etc.
- Knock on effects of the restructure that staff are unhappy with
- Learning from case file audits needs to be shared more widely than just with the specific member of staff whose file it is.
- Senior managers aren't always aware of what is happening on the ground.
- More permanent workers
- Sufficient handover periods for changing roles
- Consistency across the service - some areas are more settled than others.
- Specialist and service knowledgeable admin to free up social worker time and ensure more efficient signposting to correct team within the service

4.5.3 Specific messages from the restructure

- The speed of implementation of the restructure has meant cases have been reallocated several times affecting the children and families
- Changes to RAS were not managed well and are still having repercussions in terms of delays to allocation and changes in practice for some social workers
- Service area preferences seem to have been ignored
- The impact of the restructure has been staff leaving, low morale, feeling undervalued and poorly communicated with by senior managers and the work load has "trebled"
- There was also an impact in terms of scaling down cases to CAF level 2/3 - but this is now settling down too in the Family Hubs
- Will need significant time to bed down - 18 months.

4.6 Key message - staff are willing to put up with some bumpy bits through the changes, but they need to:

- Have consistent and constant communication - a "bear with us" message rather than "deal with it" approach
- See the benefits of the changes
- Feel valued and listened to
- Reduction in caseloads would be the one thing they would change to improve their working environment.

5 Meeting with the Children's Services Senior Leadership Team

5.1 Members discussed the findings from the social worker focus groups with the children's services senior leadership team.

- 5.2 There was a recognition from the senior leadership team that the service redesign had been a difficult process and that staff had found it hard. However they questioned whether there was a viable alternative to implementing the changes. To try and manage the transition the Senior Leadership Team had delivered several staff workshops in the run up to the changes.
- 5.3 A significant number of staff had got their preference for areas of work but it was not possible to do this for all staff. Staff are able to request internal transfers if they are unhappy with the area in which they are working and it was reported that some staff who had originally expressed a desire to move were happy with their new team.
- 5.4 Members were informed that social workers kept their caseloads during the transition to the new service to provide continuity for staff and families.
- 5.5 It was recognised by the senior leadership team that there was still more work to be done on managing caseloads and this was an area for improvement.
- 5.6 With relation to sharing the learning from case file audit information, currently there is a practice improvement forum for all case audits in the form of open sessions to all staff; slides from those sessions are then shared across the service. Audit reports are shared with all managers.
- 5.7 Audits are considered to be important drivers to upskill staff. Some staff obviously aren't clicking into that and there needs to be a way of reminding staff that the information is available and how to access it.
- 5.8 There was recognition that despite improvements in recruitment this had to be matched by improvements in retention to address the issue of turnover of staff, reliance on agency work and in turn the quality of the work force.
- 5.9 The Senior Leadership Team referred to the progressions scheme as a way of encouraging good social workers to stay in Coventry. By creating a career pathway, this will contribute to retention.
- 5.10 **Market Supplement and Advanced Practitioners**
- 5.11 Members were concerned that the removal of the market supplement may lead to some social workers leaving the authority and as a result increase reliance on agency staff. The cost of an agency social worker is an additional £30,000 pa.
- 5.12 All social workers currently receiving the market supplement will be entitled to apply to become advanced practitioners. However it was recognised that there would be some loss of social workers.
- 5.13 Members were assured that the process for becoming an advanced practitioner will be robust and those who don't quite make standard will be supported to do so. Members were assured that there would be no automatic transfer of social workers with supplement to the advanced practitioner role.
- 5.14 Members were also assured that social workers with very poor or dangerous practice would be exited from their jobs, if improvement could not be demonstrated.
- 5.15 Advanced practitioners will be expected to have 3 years post qualifying experience, then there will be a young people's panel and a panel of middle and senior managers to ensure that candidates meet the criteria for the role.
- 5.16 It was agreed that the Trade Unions need to be able to see the fairness and openness of the process.

6 Finance and HR issues

- 6.1 Members were provided with financial information on the current funded posts within Children's Services Social care, implemented as part of the workforce redesign. (Appendix 3)
- 6.2 There are a number of assumptions underpinning the staffing model including:
- Caseloads: built in at 14 per social worker for Looked after children and child protection, and 20 per social worker for children in need, and 25 per personal advisor for former relevant children (leaving care) In addition to this, reductions to caseload have been made for certain posts (e.g. Senior Practitioners, newly qualified social workers NQSW)
 - Advanced Social Worker Posts (Grade 8): the structure includes resource to convert 50 FTE grade 7 Social Worker posts into Grade 8 Advanced social worker posts.
- 6.3 Members were informed that the introduction of the advanced social worker posts were cost neutral as a result of the removal of the market supplement.
- 6.4 Members welcomed the introduction of the advanced social worker and wanted to see a clear progression route for social workers, possibly in a flow chart that showed the different routes including different roles of senior practitioner and advanced social worker.
- 6.5 Members asked questions about the reduction in salary for those social workers who lose the market supplement but do not take the offered route to advanced social worker. Members also requested that officers were mindful of any extra costs of agency staff to cover vacancies caused by staff previously on the supplement leaving their posts.
- 6.6 Members also considered information gathered from exit interview of staff who had left the organisation (Appendix 4).
- 6.7 Members asked whether all that could be done to address the issues had been raised as reasons for leaving the organisation. Officers explained the current arrangements for job share and part time working. Social Workers worked within the same terms and conditions as other Council staff, including TOIL and flexi-time.
- 6.8 Members requested that information from exit interviews was collated and assessed on a regular basis, which should also include a breakdown of length of service of those staff who are leaving to monitor whether the turnover is in newer staff or longer established members of staff.
- 6.9 Members also discussed the working environment of social workers and whether hot-desking was appropriate. They also considered whether social workers had appropriate space to meet to discuss issues and share information, and whether social workers required different working environments to other Council staff.
- 6.10 Parking and appropriate electronic devices to enable social workers to do their jobs effectively were also discussed.

7 Results of consultation undertaken

- 7.1 Members of the task and finish group consulted with social workers employed by the city. The Social Workers were asked questions about their experiences with Coventry, what has worked and what would make them stay. They were also asked about what could be improved and also about the market supplement. The comments from social workers have been summarised in section 4 above.

8 Timetable for implementing this decision

- 8.1 The recommendations from the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) can be implemented immediately.

9 Comments from Director of Finance and Corporate Services

9.1 Financial implications

The Children's Services structure has been funded as per the staffing model set out in paragraph 6.2. This position was built into the budget setting report taken to Cabinet in February. The administrative support for the service will need to be delivered within the overall budget for Admin and Business Services in 2018/19 and beyond. The refurbishment costs for Broadgate have also been budgeted for as part of the capital programme.

9.2 Legal implications

There are no specific legal implications in this report.

9.3 Other implications

None

9.4 How will this contribute to the Council Plan (www.coventry.gov.uk/councilplan/)?

The recommendations will contribute to the Council Plan, by supporting the "Protecting our most vulnerable citizens" and supporting the Children Services Transformation Programme contributing to the Workforce Transformation aspect.

10 How is risk being managed?

There is a risk that by removing the market supplement there will be a short term loss of staff, meaning an increase in agency staff. This risk is being mitigated by the opportunity for those staff to become advanced practitioners and the ongoing recruitment programme to recruit permanent staff to vacancies.

11 What is the impact on the organisation?

The impact on the organisation will be a stable social work workforce, which in turn will improve the quality and practice of the workforce. This will in turn improve outcomes for children and families and also reduce the financial cost of reliance on agency staff.

12 Equalities / EIA

There are no direct equality or EIA impacts of the recommendations.

13 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

14 Implications for partner organisations?

There are no implications for partner organisations

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