

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 6 September 2016

Subject: Raising Standards of Practice in Children’s Social Care

Report of: Strategic Director of Children’s Services

Summary

The report provides an update on progress in Children’s Social Care in relation to recruitment, retention and the raising of social work practice.

Recommendation

That the report be noted and a further update on progress be requested in 6 months time.

Wards Affected: All

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

None

1. Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide Young People and Children's Scrutiny Committee members with an update on progress in Children's Social Care in relation to recruitment, retention and the raising of social work practice.
2. The report will draw on analysis of our audit activity since the new quality assurance framework was implemented in March 2016.

2. Recruitment

- 2.1 Members will be aware of the significant investment that was agreed for Children's Services at Full Council on 12 July 2016, to enable a significant growth in our social work capacity. It was agreed to increase front line social workers and senior social workers by a total of 86, with 14 additional team manager posts also being agreed. This will take our full-time permanent number of social workers to 293 and team managers to 32.
- 2.2 We launched our 'Becoming the Best' social work recruitment campaign in March 2016, initially targeted to recruit to existing social work vacancies, however we are now actively engaged in recruiting higher numbers of social workers against the additional capacity.
- 2.3 This campaign has proven very successful and we have already offered 62 social workers posts 11 of whom have start dates agreed, with the other applicants progressing through pre employment checks. The service continues to hold weekly recruitment panels and we are confident we can appoint and induct all new starters incrementally, to all vacancies within the next 5 months.
- 2.4 The service has also embarked on our recruitment to team manager and service manager posts and have partnered with Caritas Recruitment Specialists for a targeted approach to attract the very best managers to join our service. At the time of writing we have offered posts to 3 service managers and 3 team managers who are all now in pre-employment checks. We still have 4 service manager vacancies and 9 Team Manager vacancies. We have further assessment and interview panels set up for early August 2016 and will provide a verbal update to members of progress.
- 2.5 In order to support and maintain the pace of the improvement activity further recruitment of agency locum social workers, team managers and service managers has also taken place pending the permanent staff commencing employment. It is fair to say that we have experienced more difficulty identifying quality agency social workers than permanent staff however all management posts are now covered and we have secured additional temporary social work posts.

3. Retention

- 3.1 The turn over rate of frontline social workers for the financial year 2015/16 was 12%. This compares favourably with a regional turnover rate of 14.8% and a

national turnover rate of 17%. Turnover in Manchester historically for social workers has averaged around 20%.

3.2 The time-limited retention payment scheme positively impacted on turnover rates for the year. It has been noted that following the scheme ended in June 2016 turnover has started to rise. However we are encouraged however that to date it has not returned to pre-scheme rates. Turnover for June 2016 was 0.33% and July 2016 2.63% which remains below previous averages.

3.3 It is however fair to say that we anticipate a period where we may see increased turnover of social workers as we raise expectations of practice it is inevitable that some staff will decide that Manchester is not for them and opt to move on in a positive way. We are confident however that people with a commitment to improving practice and to Manchester will remain with the council as they are likely to be motivated by the new developments, opportunities and increased focus on delivering excellence in our future service.

3.4 The Children's Management Team have now began to put in place a number of measures that will ensure Manchester is an employer of choice for the future generation of social workers. The focus is on culture change with priority work streams linked to;

- Developing a clear sense of purpose/ culture of success
- Improving work/life balance through reducing caseloads by increasing capacity and ensuring there is no drift in care planning for children.
- Increasing the ability to work flexibly by providing basic modern technology to social workers on the frontline.
- Access to good quality management support
- Engagement sessions to ensure social workers are able to influence strategic thinking and planning
- Development of a strong continual professional development offer
- Development of a career pathway that enables experienced social workers to remain in front line practice

4. Raising of Social Work Standards

4.1 There is no doubt that the investment being made to enable the service to recruit an additional 86 social workers and 14 team managers will significantly support the service to raise practice standards. The fundamental factor that will lead to such improvements in practice will be social workers reduced case loads. We anticipate we will have the capacity to reduce social work case loads to 20 by October 2016, and to 18 by January 2017.

4.2 Since our last update to scrutiny panel there has been significant activity to support our managers and social workers to develop a culture and professional environment that will allow great social work practice to flourish. Examples of this include;

- Introduction of a management development program led by members of the Children's Management Team, early sessions focusing on culture change and leadership.
- Implemented a weekly Practice Development Group to enable service managers to actively scrutinise our core social care performance
- In June 2016 service managers introduced a weekly performance group at team/locality level 'Monday Morning Meeting'.
- Embedding of signs of safety within supervision
- Promoted a reflective learning and development culture by enhancing the role of our social work consultants within localities
- Update and refresh of our practice standards which have now been rolled out
- Developed our Quality Assurance framework to measure our progress against these agreed standards of good practice.
- The Workforce Development Strategic Group has continued to meet overseeing the work force development plan,
- Colleagues from HROD have supported the service to map out career pathways and development opportunities for social workers and have been supported by HROD colleagues to map out CPD expectations linked to the Knowledge and Skills Statement (of the Chief Social Worker).
- Agreed to pilot with the rest of our GM Local Authorities the roll out of the accreditation and assessment framework in 2017.
- Launched Research in Practice in June 2016 – a web based resource tool that all our social care staff can now access.

4.3 Since the last scrutiny report in March 2016 there has also been an increased focus on improving our managerial grip and oversight of social work practice in the city. Whilst the service is very much on an improvement journey there are a number of examples that now show impact.

- Managers within the service have now implemented systems whereby performance is being tracked ahead of 'deadlines' to ensure we do not find ourselves in a deficit position in the future.
- This has led to significant improvements in the recording of our visits to children, and we can say with confidence now that all looked after children and children subject to a child protection plan have been seen within the required timeframe, or where this has not been possible (we have a small number of children to whom this applies) that managers are justifiable reasons for this and are tracking progress to ensure these children are safe and that there is a proactive multiagency plan in place.
- The refreshed approach to performance management has highlighted specific teams where we need to focus ourselves on improving practice. Support is now being targeted at these teams to drive up standards.
- New and improved practice guidance is being implemented in relation to children in need (CIN). The service is now beginning to track timeliness of visits and plans for children allocated to social workers for CIN support.
- Supervision levels for social workers are now actively monitored so we know social workers are getting sufficient levels of supervision.

- There has been a focus on reducing case loads, with some success as the number of 'outliers' has reduced, although case load averages have remained stubbornly higher than we would wish at 23. This will be addressed when the additional capacity social workers begin to join the teams.

5. Quality Assurance

- 5.1 The service has now embedded a robust quality assurance process for file audit, with monthly reports being provided to the children's management team demonstrating key themes and learning that will be rolled out through learning sessions led by the social work consultants.
- 5.2 The outcomes to date of our monthly audits show a gradually improving picture of practice, with the majority being judged as at least 'requires improvement', 'good' or 'outstanding'.
- 5.3 Positively there have been no escalations as part of the audit process meaning no children have identified at risk.
- 5.4 Where case records have been judged to be 'inadequate', the common themes have generally related to poor case recording, lack of evidence of 'voice' of the child, and timeliness of case recording rather than failings that specifically impact on children themselves. There is an established process whereby all actions identified within audit have been followed up and are tracked by the social work consultants to ensure any deficits are addressed and 'lessons learned'.
- 5.5 The audit findings demonstrate that overall practice remains variable in key areas, and there is a need to continue with pace to make improvements. However at this time in our improvement journey we should celebrate that, despite the accepted capacity issue in the service, the evidence from auditing activity does not indicate widespread poor quality records and/or social work practice.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The service have put in place the strategies, systems and processes to ensure we have the framework and structures in place that will create the right environment for great social work to flourish. The main drive to achieve this is ensuring we recruit and retain the right social workers, managers and service leaders to support our improvement journey and strive for excellence.
- 6.2 There are positive indicators outlined in this report that some progress is being made in advance of the additional social work capacity being in place.
- 6.3 Whilst this is positive it is also clear that at this time practice remains too variable and it is essential the service continue to work hard, from the frontline to strategic and political leadership, to ensure we escalate this progress as our social work capacity increases. The approach to induction and continual professional development, practice challenge and audit/review will ensure we are able to achieve a stable, confident, ambitious workforce within children's social care to

embed solid social work practice with our most vulnerable children and families living in the city.