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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 31 January 2017

**Subject:** Post Ofsted Improvement Plan Update: Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers and Standards of Social Work Practice

**Report of:** Strategic Director of Children's Services

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**Summary**

The report sets out progress against the recruitment and retention programme for the scale up in capacity of the Social Work service in order to adequately manage overall demand whilst reducing caseloads to safe levels; and improvements in the standard of social work practice; since the last update to the Committee in September 2016

**Recommendations**

The committee is asked to note the contents of this report

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Demand and Capacity – Investing to Succeed in Children's Social Care Full Council – July 2016

- Raising Standards of Practice in Children's Social Care CYPSC – September 2016

## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in 2014 highlighted that Social Worker caseloads were too high, leaving staff often 'unable to prioritise and address children's needs effectively.' Services were not of sufficient quality and were not being offered in a timely fashion. To address this issue, and drive an increased pace of improvement, the Council agreed additional investment of £10.16m into the frontline service in July 2016. This funding was agreed to bring caseloads down to levels commensurate with best practice against the target levels demand for the City measured against statutory neighbours and core cities. Supported by the work to reduce demand on the Social Work service through the Troubled Families and Early Help strategies, it was calculated that a further 86 Social Workers and 14 frontline Team Managers were required. Taking the fulltime permanent number of social workers to 293 and team managers to 32.
- 1.2 This report sets out the progress since the previous update to committee in September 2016 on achieving the programme of recruitment; improve staff retention, and the commensurate improvements in practice of the service.

## **2.0 Recruitment**

- 2.1 At the time the additional investment in capacity was approved the Directorate had already established a refreshed Social Work recruitment campaign, 'Becoming the Best,' which had been working to drive up the standard of recruitment to existing social work vacancies. The campaign was subsequently repurposed and scaled up to lead the programme of recruitment to the additional capacity.
- 2.2 At the time of the September 2016 update to Committee the service had made offers to 56 full time social work posts with a further 30 applicants in the process of undergoing pre-employment assessment and interview. A rolling programme of weekly recruitment panels was in place and the target for full establishment of the increased service was on track for January 2017.
- 2.3 Running alongside the permanent recruitment programme the service engaged a number of agency staff, with a view to securing the maximum capacity at the earliest opportunity, accelerating the pace of improvement by reducing caseloads for all staff.
- 2.4 The 'Becoming the Best' campaign has proven to be successful in attracting not only the numbers required to fully staff the permanent structure but has also seen a breadth of high calibre and experienced staff joining the service, or due to join. Whereas previously Manchester had recruited high levels of Newly Qualified Social Workers, the mix of new staff and experienced through the current recruitment campaign has brought a welcome mix of fresh energy and impetus with experience, knowledge and peer leadership, which is a welcome benefit to the morale and internal development of the services. A number of agency staff has also converted to permanent posts, deciding they wish to continue their Social Work career on a permanent basis in the City.

- 2.5 The Directorate established a partnership recruitment programme with Caritas Recruitment Specialists to support a targeted approach to securing high quality Team and Service Managers for the City. This programme was launched in June 2016 and by August 2016 had offered posts to 4 Service Managers and 3 Team Managers, again with a continuing rolling programme of interview panels.
- 2.6 To date the combined recruitment campaigns have successfully appointed:
- 105 Social Workers
  - 11 Team Managers
  - 6 Service Managers

There are still 64 shortlisted candidates who are due to attend either initial Assessment Centres or interviews. There will be a review and refresh exercise to update the workforce strategy later in January and February which will be considered by the Children's Services Management Team in March 2017.

- 2.7 The recruitment campaign continues though we are reducing assessment centres from weekly to monthly as we now near full capacity.

### **3.0 Retention**

- 3.1 Historically Manchester has had an average turnover rate for Social Workers of 20%. This should be seen in the context of a national average of 17% and a regional average of 14.8%. However, in the last 12 months the turnover of frontline social workers has been reported to be an average of 15% and more positively as at 31/12/16 14%.
- 3.2 The offer to front line staff from management, as evidenced by the commitment to reducing caseloads, has been to develop a culture of respect and high support for allowing the space and reinforcement for good practice to develop, the ask in return to staff has been a greater expectation and challenge on performance and improving practice. The shift in culture has been welcomed by staff and recent feedback from external scrutiny has reinforced the position that front line staff do feel more motivated and driven to succeed and perform to higher levels, and are supported by management at all levels to do so.
- 3.3 The support offer to Social Workers has been extended to support our retention strategy with the addition of 6 Social Work Consultant roles, responsible for supporting the learning and development of both experienced and newly qualified social workers, providing additional support to ensure we have a resilient, well trained, workforce.
- 3.4 In addition to the shifting culture within the service, we are developing a comprehensive offer to staff, from the moment they start and throughout their career with Manchester City Council. The induction programme supports incoming staff through a smooth transition into the service, with reduced caseloads and increased management supervision. Historically staff have had

issues with the equipment and facilities available to them, we have invested in the best to equip our staff to be able to perform, removing barriers to safe and secure working arrangements. This has included rolling out new ICT equipment to Social Work staff first across the organisation, a constant programme of improvements in office facilities, driven by feedback from the front line teams, and supported as priority by the Corporate Core and estates teams. We are removing the barriers and creating the environment for our staff to develop, and for good practice to flourish. Our staff report feeling more respected and morale is increasing.

- 3.5 We are also supporting our staff to become the best and to develop professionally by bringing leading research led practice tools and approaches to the City. This approach is underpinned by the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model; which is a comprehensive programme that has been rolled out across the service; including partner agencies. To support the embedding of this practice approach we hold regular management and staff development sessions. We are confident that the package of support and development for our staff will support increasing retention and this will in turn drive improving practice as more and more locally developed experience is retained within the City.

#### **4.0 Practice Improvement**

- 4.1 Increased capacity within the service and a stable and secure workforce are pre-requisites for safe and effective practice to emerge, embed, develop and sustain. Through the success of the recruitment campaign and the work to improve staff retention over the recent months, we have built a solid foundation on which a strengthened management grip of performance, together with improved quality assurance arrangements can and is now driving forward the required improvement in practice and consistency of practice.
- 4.2 A weekly Practice Development Group of Service and Team Managers has been established with oversight of performance as a 'window' to practice underpinned by restorative leadership approach of high challenge and support. The group scrutinises practice performance closely on a routine basis, reviews management reporting and data, as well as driving thematic reviews of key areas of performance highlighted within the meetings and across practice. The monthly Directorate Performance Clinic provides a further layer of strong challenge and is continuing to drive improving compliance across all areas of the service.
- 4.3 An example of the increasing management focus and practice oversight being driven through the new performance structure includes a recent review of all Looked After Children care plans by the Service Managers undertaken in December 2016 to drive improvements in permanency planning. Each Service Manager considered every looked after child and scrutinised care plans to ensure they are appropriate, and show a clear commitment to ensuring permanency is achieved as quickly as possible. This is to be brought together in a 'Challenge Session' later this month. Similar programmes are taking place

- routinely to challenge and quality assure practice in a variety of areas across the services. Such a close focus on practice allows the service to identify thematic issues and areas of concerns and to build these in to the continuing professional development feedback loop within the service, as well as allowing the highlighting of good and innovative practice back through the service.
- 4.4 Evidence from audit activity and the recent Ofsted monitoring visits is demonstrating broad improvement across the service.
- 4.5 Case auditing has achieved 100% compliance against the planned schedule over the previous two months with anticipated audits, and the new moderation and tracking process being embedded and strengthened. We have instituted a 'closing the loop' programme that provides assurance that all audit actions are tracked to ensure that they are completed on individual cases. The Quality Assurance (QA) framework has been improved with members of the Children's Senior Management Team meeting monthly with service managers and consultant social workers to review all QA audit activity in each of the locality teams to confirm that actions have been delivered and closed off. The Service is confident that under our new QA arrangements we are both keeping a close and critical eye on individual practice, ensuring issues are addressed and individual issues remedied rapidly and individual worker practice improved, as well as ensuring the systemic and thematic oversight of matters that emerge consistently.
- 4.6 A critical area for the service is the continuing drive down of looked after children numbers, those on child protection plans and the increasing use of the Child in Need planning process. We recognise that assurance around the Child in Need process is not as strong as it should be. The service have refreshed and reissued child in need practice guidance and service managers have been actively support all front line staff to ensure that every appropriate case has a care plan in place, which is reviewed and updated regularly.
- 4.7 In summary, the service is in a much stronger place on the journey to delivery excellent services to the children and young people of Manchester and at pace. The leadership and management grip of the service is strong and driving forward improvement, together with the front line staff.
- 4.8 Morale is much improved and the cultural shift towards high challenge and high support is taking hold. There remain many challenges around embedding the necessary improvements and ensuring consistency of good practice across the board. But we are confident, and reassured by external scrutiny, that we have developed the essential foundations for improvement to move us into the Requires Improvement category and on to Good in the future.