

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 17 July 2019

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

Report of: Strategic Director, Children and Education Services

Summary

This report provides an overview on the work undertaken in regards to raising standards of practice in Children's Social Care.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Scrutiny Committee Members consider the progress and impact being achieved in practice improvement across Children's Social Care through the delivery of the Workforce Strategy 2017-2020 and seek assurance with regard to;

1. The continuous drive for improvement through the revised Quality Assurance Framework, focus on recruitment and retention, creating a strong learning and development culture and the delivery of 'Our practice' philosophy.
 2. Benefits of an Integrated Workforce Strategy for Children & education Services 2020-2023 to be delivered by March 2020.
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Wards Affected: All

Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)

Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Over the last twelve months we have invested in the learning and development opportunities of the workforce and career progression. Most note is the Social Work degree apprenticeship through Manchester Metropolitan University that commenced in March 2019 for 11 current Children & Education staff.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Improved recruitment and retention with a significant focus on career and individual progression through driving a learning and development culture.
A progressive and equitable city:	The reduction in the numbers of children requiring a

making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	social worker are facilitating improvements in the quality of work which in turn are leading to better outcomes for children.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	A focus on delivering a locality model of Social Care where the support is driven by local resources, networks and amenities.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Manchester Social care have been fortunate to be involved in a number of national initiatives to improve practices across the services including, No Wrong Door, NAAS.

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Background documents (available for public inspection): None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The delivery of services provided by practitioners, managers and leaders within Social care is fundamental for improving outcomes for Children, Young People and Families. Over the last few years the focus has been on ensuring we are compliant in delivering services across Children's. We have achieved this and we have seen success in delivering timely services to all children and young people who require help, support or protection. The focus now is on quality and how we mature as a stable, confident and skilled workforce.
- 1.2 We have in place a Workforce Learning and Development Strategy 2017-2020 that sets out our ambition to create a skilled, confident and stable workforce. The Workforce Learning and Development Strategy sets out a high aspiration for Manchester's children, young people and families' which is underpinned by key behaviour and principle. It ensures our workforce are promoting resilience, working in a strengths based way and working with, not doing to children, young people and families but working alongside them.
- 1.3 We are asked by OFSTED in our self-evaluation to answer three questions, which this report discusses, (i) what do we know about the quality and impact of Social Work practice in Manchester, (ii) how do we know it and (iii) what are the plans for the next 12 months to main and improve practice.
- 1.4 This report outlines the work completed in delivering the key priorities for the Workforce Strategy. The key workforce priorities from the Workforce Strategy, which are integral to improving practice are discussed within this report and identifies the focus for the year ahead. The Key priorities are:
 - Recruitment
 - Retention and Succession Planning 'achieving stability'
 - Workforce planning
 - Creating a high impact culture
 - Setting standards and delivering outcomes
 - Learning and development
 - Leadership and management
 - Engagement in the development and delivery of a Greater Manchester strategy.
- 1.5 The delivery of the key priorities over the last twelve months has concentrated on the learning and development of staff. We have invested in improving the plans for key programmes within Children's Services and delivered on some milestones that are highlighted throughout this report. In doing this has allowed us to shift the focus to quality of practice with a strong learning and development offer.
- 1.6 We have defined 'Our Practice', which explains the relationship focused strength based principles, the evidence based approaches and models that support practice and considers the impact of this in improving outcomes for children, young people and families. 'Our Practice' underpins the improvement journey for driving quality of practice.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Most instrumental in raising standards of practice is a stable workforce and we have made significant progress with regard to **recruitment and retention of staff** and this has led to a sustained reduction in the average caseload for social workers and use of agency staff. We have a strong Assessed Supported Year Employment programme for Newly Qualified Social Workers. In a recent questionnaire the Newly Qualified Social Workers told us that they generally felt well supported within the programme, benefited from the learning and development opportunities and found management & the Social Work Consultants availability supportive. The reflective supervision was highlighted as a real positive. This work was acknowledged during a positive Quality Assurance focus visit from Skills for Care visit in April 2019.
- 2.2 The Social Work Apprenticeship programme the first in the country has been an excellent opportunity for existing Children's & Education Services staff to strengthen the knowledge and skills through the use of the apprenticeship levy, we have been able to support 11 individuals who will become qualified Social Workers. The programme reflects the diverse nature of the workforce and has provided opportunities for staff to gain higher educational awards. We continue to attract postgraduate social workers from the participation of the national social work programmes 'Step Up to Social Work & Frontline'. This brings varying talent into the services providing highly skilled practitioners given their previous employment, academic and learning experiences; making this a solid foundation to our approach to the recruitment of Social Workers.
- 2.3 In creating a stable workforce affords us the space to focus on developing practice approaches and models. We have been relentless over the last twelve months in ensuring we improve our approach to practice. **Signs of Safety** continues to be the underpinning approach for Social Work practice with a consistent drive on developing the approach in all areas across Children's Services. Signs of Safety sit within '**Our Practice**', it is a model which gives practitioners across all services a clear understanding of how the Signs of Safety approach supports us to work safely, effectively and efficiently to build a future for our children where they are safe, happy, healthy and successful.
- 2.4 The Social Work Consultants who form the Quality Assurance and Learning & Development team are the drivers in supporting staff to understand the principles, the practice models and approaches that underpin the work we do with children, young people and families and the goals and objectives through considering impact. Over recent months the Social Work Consultants have developed 'Our practice', which is a visual page that explains the relationship focused strength based principles, the evidence based approaches and models that support practice and considers the impact on how we practice in improving outcomes for children, young people and families.
- 2.5 Signs of Safety is used in assessment, planning, management oversight and reviewing CIN/CP casework and when making decisions. We recognise that Signs of Safety is a model of practice which affords the social worker staff

group a structural approach to practice and ensures a common language across the children system. Although fully embedded in the areas as outlined above, it is acknowledged that a model must be supported with ongoing improvement work to compliment the model; we have prioritised case mapping as this will assist in workers capacity to assess and ameliorate risk. The growth of the model will continue to be consolidated alongside this, building confident practitioners.

2.6 Such approaches demonstrate that we practice in a strength based way that is a high challenge high support operating culture characterised by evidenced based and informed by data. Furthering our commitment to ensuring data informs quality assurance the service is investing in a new management information system, Liquid Logic, this investment will ensure live and more meaningful data will be available across the organisation. A 'go live' date has been set for 30th July 2019.

2.7 The learning and development offer focuses on the 'Golden Threads' for evidencing the quality practice. In doing so, we must ensure that every child, young person and family have (1) quality assessments, (2) quality plans, (3) an effective impact chronology, (4) strong management oversight, including supervision, (5) the child's voice and (6) the parents / carers engagement. The Golden Threads should all evidence the strength based approaches to practice that are adopted in Manchester with the overarching being the Signs of Safety Model.

2.8 The 'Our Practice' sets the core training required for practitioners throughout the services. The Social Work Consultants deliver a number of training sessions that are essential for understanding 'Our Practice' and derived from service priorities. The key training regularly delivered over the last twelve months have included:

- Signs of Safety
- Child's Journey to Permanence
- Impact Chronology/SMART Planning
- Words & Pictures
- Voice of the Child

2.9 The Social Work Consultants have lead and developed from a Children and Educational Services perspective a number of key initiatives / training that have supported the knowledge and skills of practitioners working with children, young people and families in Manchester including:

- ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Graded Care Profile 2 (assessing neglect)
- Safe & Together
- MSCB Neglect
- MSCB Physical Abuse
- MSCB Domestic Abuse
- MSCB Private Fostering
- MSCB Parental Mental Health and Child Protection

This work has been instrumental in providing practitioners with a varied tool kit for engaging with children, young people and families to support good quality assessment and plans.

- 2.10 The improved and focused workforce learning and development offer to staff has contributed to a more stable workforce. Our most recent social worker “health check” indicated that 93.6% of social workers in the service felt that the work was matched to their skills, abilities and interests. The transfer to a new recording system this month will assist social workers further in their assessment. A revised assessment tool is to be implemented with our new recording system and this will again assist with consistency. We recognise that consistency and confident practice is not fully embedded yet, but expect greater consistency as the tools and systems embed.
- 2.11 How Our Practice is best evidenced is through the direct work that is evident with children and through the use of ‘Family Network’ meetings to explore family based interventions and potential family members to expand on the support and/or care for children. We have seen some really positive stories from using the varying practice models / approaches with children, families and young people across the services.
- 2.12 We have revised our Practice Standards to reflect our ‘golden threads’ and reach for consistent practice. To support the embedding of ‘Our Practice & the Practice Standards we have implemented a Practice Improvement Forum, sharing best practice and championing excellence. Social Workers are invested in their own learning and development, which will drive improvement in practice, which is strongly evident in their engagement.
- 2.13 Social Workers in Manchester have engaged well with the DFE programme for Social Workers to become accredited as a child and family practitioner through the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS). The aim of the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) is to provide a consistent way to assure that child and family practitioners, supervisors and leaders have the knowledge and skills for effective practice. To date we have had 70 Social Workers take the assessment. We have aligned the Career Progression Pathway with NAAS so we are able to start to benchmark the standard of Social Work expertise and quality of practice against the Knowledge and Skills Statement for Social Work in the council through NAAS accreditation. While we can benchmark against success of NAAS we mirror a similar benchmark with an alternative career progression criteria in Social Work given NAAS is voluntary. This is overseen by the Learning & Development Manager.
- 2.14 We recognise that working with children, young people and families requires a variety of emotional and psychological skills in addition to theory and knowledge around practice. This is especially true for supervisors, managers and leaders. In October 2017 we launched the bespoke ILM endorsed programme for Children’s Social care staff ‘Our Manchester, Our Children, Our Leaders’. To date we have delivered the programme to all Team Managers

within Children's Services through 4 cohorts with the final cohort starting in May 2019.

- 2.15 We have piloted a senior social work Skills Matrix - forming groups that are experts in their field and champion elements of front line practice that is shared across services. This has shown a positive impact and continues to grow the confidence of our workforce. The Workforce Learning and Development Manager maps all training and development programme that will nurture and build confidence in our workforce.
- 2.16 The current **Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Framework** to date has provided further evidence of what we are doing well, what we need to improve on and is the basis for monitoring and tracking quantitative and qualitative indicators. This framework is currently being developed further and is underpinned by Our Manchester Behaviours and Principles and in turn feeds our approach to management, strategic direction setting and continuous service improvement. The services' capacity to utilise performance/assurance information to drive improved outcomes for children has been recognised by OFSTED both in their reinspection of Manchester's children's services in 2017 and again in their most recent focus visit in September 2018; both assess that 'senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths of the services and areas that require improvement'.
- 2.17 Evidence from our quality assurance and peer challenges indicates that children and young people have more input and being better included with regard to their plans and their voice is being heard. Examples are taken from our Quality Assurance overview report from April where it demonstrates that there is strong evidence to show that social workers have been persistent in seeking to communicate with and involve parents/carers in arrangements for children and young people - some parents are attending reviews and contributing to assessments and plans. Our aim is to develop this further to deliver this more consistency for all children.

3.0 Priorities for the Year Ahead.

- 3.1 Over the next twelve months we will focus our energy on embedding some key documents that have been recently reviewed or will be reviewed in order to continue the journey for excellence. The most significant in regards to practice improvement is the Quality Assurance Framework. The revised Quality Assurance Framework will reflect our continued ambition and drive to improve the quality of practice and our ten commitments to improve practice. Implementation of the revised QAF will be in September 2019.
- 3.2 Moving forward the new Quality Assurance Framework recognises the strengths in service delivery and through supportive challenge we will work together to reflect, learn and continuously improve outcomes for children. The Quality Assurance Framework is a 'whole service' framework. It is designed to capture and drive quality practice across Children's Services. The framework will be measured against the new Practice Standards that reflect the 'golden threads' in Children's. It will provide clear guidance on the approach, roles,

responsibilities and expectations of practitioners and front line managers when working with children, young people and families in Manchester and leaders in overseeing this.

- 3.3 The Quality Assurance Framework sets out not just how we gather information about children's lives but essentially how we evidence that the information that we gather includes the voice and influence of children and young people and that we can see the impact of good quality of practice through better outcomes for children.
- 3.4 It is important that we ensure the essential skills that are most relevant and useful for practitioners, supervisors, managers and leaders are considered and reviewed when considering training programmes or coaching. We have highlighted in this report that we have already commenced considering how we can deliver training or coaching in skill areas but this will also align with engagement with staff, findings from quality assurance activities or service priorities as area of development.
- 3.5 The **workforce learning and development** for the year ahead will not only drive practice but focus on the resilience and personal (wellbeing) development of staff. Develop further a culture of learning and development is a key priority for the service over the next 12 months. The key priorities for the year ahead in regards to learning and development are:
- *Induction.* A new induction has been revised, capturing our work and practice ethos and ensuring new starters receive excellent inductions and the right training. The induction will be supported by the Social Work Consultants across the city. A new Induction booklet has been completed for Children's Services staff and will be ready for launch in August 2019.
 - *Continued focus on recruitment.* A recruitment and retention Group has been set up for Social Work. The aim of this group is to develop a sustainable plan for the recruitment and retention of staff with good quality inductions and creating an environment for staff to flourish that concentrates on providing staff with a strong and robust induction.

We will continuously review a more cohesive approach to the varying routes into Social Work to support a stronger recruitment and retention strategy. meet the degree standards for becoming a qualified Social Worker. We will scope out the viability of an additional cohort to be supported through the Social Work degree apprenticeship programme in 2020.

- *Assessed Supported Year Employment Programme.* The ASYE programme will continue to be a priority for the local authority and whilst we continue to make progress in the experiences of Newly Qualified Social Workers and the oversight of the programme we will further develop the programme. A Social Work Consultant will continue to lead the programme. We will be reviewing the learning and development offer of the programme and the infrastructure around recording and monitoring the progress of the programme, including the portfolio.

- *Social Work Consultant Lead Training - Practice development.* The Social Work Consultants will continue to support and deliver and coordinate the key training programmes around practice. They will play a more integral part of the Quality Assurance Framework, which will allow for a more coordinated approach to service priorities and training plans. A greater focus will be given to locality training or coaching through formal and informal sessions utilising the expertise within areas being coordinated by Social Work consultants.
- *Signs of Safety.* With over 100 Practice Leads across Children's Services there is real scope moving forward to develop a strong leadership in delivering and driving the Signs of Safety approach within 'Our Practice' and over the coming months a plan of how this can be achieved will be completed. The plan will support the Quality Assurance framework, better capturing good practice that is helping improve children's outcomes, as well as identifying areas where we can further improve.
- *Retention.* Investing in Social Work and practitioner development is crucial to the retention of staff. Staff that feel engaged in their learning and development are known to better succeed in their roles thus improving outcomes for Children, young people and families. We will continue to develop new initiatives alongside supporting them day to day to carry out their roles, this includes continued investment in Safe & Together (a model approach to domestic abuse that is designed to focus on promoting the best interest of children focusing on safety, permanency and well-being and strengthening the ability to understand how the perpetrator is creating harm or the risk of harm), ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences trauma informed practice), Grade Care Profile 2 (neglect assessment tool).

We will invest in staff resilience and wellbeing to better equip them in managing the complexities of working within the field of Children and Families. Within the Workforce Strategy for 2020 we will ensure that wellbeing and resilience is a priority.

We will consider the corporate training programmes for aspiring managers over the coming months and work at developing an integrated programme for Aspiring Managers within Children's & Education services over the next 6 months to ensure staff across all service areas who are experienced practitioners but would like an opportunity for progression are given such learning and development opportunities.

As part of the retention strategy for staff we will train additional Practice Educators for Social Work to encourage development opportunities for Senior Social Workers as Practice Educators. This is an excellent opportunity for staff to be supported through the career pathways.

We will continue to engage in the NAAS programme and will encourage Social Workers, Team Managers & Leaders to undertake the assessment. We will invest in training for preparation into NAAS that focuses on the Knowledge and Skills for Practitioners & Supervisors.

- *Staff engagement.* In-line with the Quality Assurance Framework and the investment in staff learning and development we will continuously seek the views, options and experiences of staff. We will continue with the Practitioner Practice Improvement Forum bi monthly and along with the Learning and Development Manager and consultant social workers, the Principal Social Worker will hold monthly locality sessions in all of the frontline teams, enabling a constant feedback for senior managers to build our culture of learning and consistency.

4.0 Recommendations

4.1 Scrutiny committee members are requested to:

- Consider the progress and impact being achieved by improving stability in the workforce, the focus on 'Our Practice', the workforce learning and development and the revised Quality Assurance Framework.
- Note the revised Workforce Learning and Development Strategy 2020-2023 being revised for March 2020.