

Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 November 2018



Children & Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Review: Role of a Social Worker from a Child's Perspective

Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

Purpose of Report

- 1 To present the findings, conclusions and recommendations of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee review report on Role of the Social Worker from a Child's Perspective attached at appendix 2.

Background

- 2 At its meeting on 14 July 2017, Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee refreshed its work programme and took the decision to carry out a scrutiny review focussing on the role of the social worker from a child's perspective.
- 3 The Committee agreed the scope of the review at its meeting on 21 November 2017 that set out the terms of reference with an aim to investigate the role of the social worker assessment and the safeguards of children from a child's perspective.
- 4 The review followed six key lines of enquiry:
 - a) How are children's social care cases referred into the service?
 - b) How are cases allocated to social workers including numbers of case files and their complexities.
 - c) How has the new training academy performed in its first year? Are places filled for the following year? What mentoring, support and career development is in place for social workers?
 - d) How robust is the approach in Durham in relation to continuity and stability for the child? How is the voice of the child reflected in casework? How does Durham compare regionally and nationally?
 - e) How are children prepared for care? Are they involved in the decision and how is this communicated to them?

f) What do children who have had contact with children's social care in County Durham say about their experiences?

5 The scoping report set out limitations of the review, in that the review would only focus on children on the edge of care and would not look at the social care of children looked after by the authority.

6 The review gathered evidence via desktop research and held eight meetings with officers working within the service including newly qualified social workers, partners working in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and most importantly young people who had experience of the service.

Conclusions

7 The review group learned of service improvements some had taken place and others such as the implementation of the new IT system is due to take place later in the year. The new electronic referral form used to refer a child when safeguarding issues will speed up the referral process. Auditing of children's social care casefiles has led to a robust quality assurance programme and aspiring to a social worker caseload of twenty cases provides support and stability for the child.

8 The introduction of fourteen Families First teams that will stay with a child until its case conclusion will provide stability and consistency and allow trust building between social worker and client. The establishment of edge of care and pre-birth teams will help to prevent more children from entering the looked after system. However, the review group stressed the importance that the new edge of care and pre-birth services be evaluated to establish their impact.

9 The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub demonstrate good partnership working in its efficiency to screen and analyse the information it receives.

10 The NQSW academy has allowed DCC to 'grow its own' social workers and has increased its intake annually. Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny committee is impressed with the performance of the academy and is eager to monitor its performance and continued development.

11 Evidence indicates there is a wide variety of training and development programmes available to social workers that will assist them to demonstrate their continual professional development that is required by Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

12 However, evidence suggests 'burnout' among social workers is more likely after working in the profession for eight years. The mental health and emotional wellbeing of social workers is equally as important as training and development.

13 Stability and consistency of their social worker is very important to children and young people especially when their lives are chaotic in other ways. However, there will be times when for whatever reason a different social

worker needs to take over a case and in such situations the social worker should take the time to familiarise themselves with the young person's case rather than ask the child to repeat their story.

- 14 Communications between children and their social worker are important for the relationship to work and trust to grow. Children and young people should be asked how they want their social worker to communicate with them and out of courtesy, and if appointments are cancelled, this information is communicated to them as soon as possible.
- 15 The review report is attached at appendix 2 and lists the recommendations on pages 3-4.

Recommendations from Review and Service Response

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 1

16 The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services continues to monitor via performance information the number of case files of social workers to ensure consistency and stability for County Durham children in contact with Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding services.

Service Response

- a) Social workers case loads are reviewed weekly by the Head of Children's Social Care. They are reviewed within a monthly performance meeting by the Director of Children and Young People's services in conjunction with the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Transformation and Partnerships.
- b) The strategic plans to support the management of social work caseloads centre around the implementation of a wide range of recruitment and retention strategies as well as strategies to ensure the timely management of social work case work.
- c) Actions taken to date to ensure that caseloads remain manageable for social workers and safe for children include agreement to commission a team of 10 additional social workers to carry 180 cases for a sixth month period pending the embedding of additional recruitment and retention strategies.
- d) A temporary market force allowance has been agreed for 'hard to fill' posts within the Families First Service for recruitment of new social workers and retention of existing experienced social workers. Over 90% of staff have signed up to this legal agreement which supports the strategy.
- e) Agreement has been reached to work with an agency who specialises in 'head hunting' for experienced social workers with a contract to

identity 10 experienced social work practitioners who would be interested in working permanently in Durham.

- f) There is a commitment to continue to support the social work academy and the associated strategy of 'growing our own social workers'. The academy in 2018/19 has 34 newly qualified social workers with two practice leads and the intention is that in 2019/20 the academy will support up to a further 30 newly qualified social workers.
- g) Other routes into social work continue to be supported by the Service and in 2018/19 there will be a further three Frontline social work units in Durham compared to one in 2017/18.
- h) Work is underway to review the way in which child in need cases are managed to ensure that children receive timely and focused support with robust step up and step down arrangements with a wide range of other support services.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 2

17 The Director of Children and Young People's Services carries out an evaluation of the new edge of care services and pre-birth services following twelve months in operation to highlight their impact on children, young people and families and on the numbers of children entering into the looked after system.

Service Response

- a) The Supporting Solutions Service was fully operational in June 2018. There will be a mid-way evaluation in December 2018 to assess impact to date and a full annual review scheduled for June 2019.
- b) The Pre Birth Service was fully operational in July 2018. This service has been evaluated externally previously and the evaluation identified significant positive impact for children; their families and the efficient use of public money through the intensive, effective and timely support to children and their families. There will be an annual evaluation of the first year of operation in July 2019.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 3

18 That all members of Durham County Council as corporate parents visit the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub at least once during their term of office and that as all members are corporate parents the Corporate Director of Resources give consideration to mandatory Corporate Parenting Training for all members of the Council.

Service Response

- a) The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub will organise a series of visits for members throughout 2018/19.

- b) Corporate Parenting training for members is noted as a mandatory requirement in the Councillors Learning and Development Programme as part of Members Induction. As this training is considered to be mandatory; training was provided in 2017 following the members election. To continuously refresh members regarding their responsibilities as corporate parents, it is also intended to provide further training to members during their term of office.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 4

19 *Durham County Council's Social Worker Academy has made excellent progress within its first year and Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is keen to monitor its development and asks that arrangements be made for report to be presented to them with information on progress and achievements.*

Service Response

- a) There is an ongoing commitment to maintain the social work academy as is described above.
- b) Children and Young People's Service proposes to report to OSC twice yearly about progress and achievements made. The first report is proposed for March 2019 with a subsequent follow up report in September 2019.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 5

20 *The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services together with the Director of Public Health consider the establishment and promotion of mental health and emotional wellbeing services for children's social care staff and for supervision to monitor staff dealing with highly emotional/sensitive cases.*

Service Response

- a) Children's social care staff will be receiving mental health and wellbeing training as part of the wider DCC corporate approach to having a workforce equipped to understand mental health and provide support and advice appropriate to grade and responsibility. This training will be bespoke to the needs of the service and have the experiences of children at the heart. There will be a universal offer to all staff to have awareness of mental health and then a graded response to the needs of staff based on their interface with young people. This training will be co-developed with the mental health foundation trust provider Tees Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) to ensure more complex aspects of children's mental health is covered effectively. The training will also be designed to support staff wellbeing to support staff resilience in a very complex and emotionally taxing role.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 6

21 Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services with assistance from children and young people, who have experience of children's social care, explore the development of a welcome pack. That would help children and young people first coming into contact with children's social care services what to expect and to include information that will help them to understand their situation.

Service Response

- a) Children and Young People's Services welcome the proposal from young people to develop a welcome pack for all those who first come into contact with children's social care.
- b) The service will work with a group of children and young people to develop this with a view to having this ready to launch in the service in April 2019. We will explore a range of ways of communicating with children and young people including use of video, animation, social media channels as well as written information.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation 7

22 The Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services establish a communication protocol between social workers and children and young people in their care.

Service Response

- a) CYPS will develop a 'contract of expectations' between children, young people and their social workers and work with IIC to develop this. This will outline practice standards and expectations about how social workers will communicate with children they work with; what the expectations of the service are if the social worker for the child needs to change and how this will be communicated to the child/young person. This work will be completed and be ready to launch in April 2019.

Recommendations

- 23 The Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to:
- (a) Receive this report and note the service response
 - (b) Consider and comment on the review report at appendix 2 including the proposed recommendations.
 - (c) Agree to submit the report to Cabinet and the Children and Family Partnership.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance - None

Staffing - None

Risk - None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The review report takes into consideration Equality and Diversity; an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

Accommodation - None

Crime and Disorder – None

Human Rights – None

Consultation – None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues – None

Legal Implications – None