

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan

Report of the Executive Director (People)
to Cabinet

(13th December 2017)

SOCIAL WORKER CASELOADS IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND SAFEGUARDING

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To obtain Cabinet's approval in order to invest in the recruitment of additional social workers in Children's Social Care Services to reduce workload pressures, improve productivity and to maintain the continued welfare of children in need of help or protection, in Barnsley..

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 **To agree to the funding and recruitment of 14 FTE additional social workers with a view to reducing caseloads in Children's Social Care front line social work teams; assessment; child protection; disability; children in care and care leavers (excluding adoption and fostering teams) from an average of 21.7 to an average of 18 cases per social worker (Please see Page 3, Paragraphs 4.3 and 4.3.1)**

3.0 Introduction

- 3.1 Lord Laming's second review of child protection, published in 2009 following the Baby P case, called for an overhaul of children's social work. Lord Laming recommended that the then Social Work Taskforce produce national guidelines, setting out maximum caseloads for social workers, indicating caseloads of a maximum of 12 in complex child protection work.
- 3.2 In 2010 the Coalition Government asked Professor Eileen Munro to review all child protection procedures in England, on the basis that previous changes had made the system too bureaucratic and stifled social worker's initiative in making difficult decisions. Professor Munro's reports were published in 2010 and 2011. The reports included issues around poor IT systems, high caseloads, limited supervision and not enough emphasis on reflective practice and decision making.
- 3.3 The above reviews were influential in the significant shift that has taken place in child protection social work, with a move away from prescriptive procedure, process and practice, to evidence based interventions and relationship based practice, where maximum time is directly spent engaging with children and families, enabling Social Workers to really understand a child's needs, experiences and the impact of harm, to help make the right decisions for children at the right time.

3.4 **National and Local Social Work Caseloads**

- 3.5 Ofsted's 2016 Social Care annual report stated that Councils should "help social workers to be able to do their job well, by giving them the time they need and the right help and support".
More recent Ofsted inspections of children's services are giving more attention to Social Workers caseloads, having identified high caseloads as a common problem in preventing local authorities from being judged as 'Good'.
- 3.6 In February 2017 the DfE reported the average caseload per Children and Family Social Worker as 16.1 cases (based on FTE counts); *DfE Experimental statistics: Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2016*.
- 3.7 In comparison to this national average, Children's Social Worker **average** caseloads in Barnsley are now 21.7 (excluding Fostering and Adoption Teams).
- 3.8 The Yorkshire and Humberside Safeguarding Assistant Directors Group undertook a benchmarking exercise in February – March 2017 on average Children's Social Worker caseloads in the region. This provided the benchmarking data which is shown in Appendix 1 of the report.
- 3.9 In summary the data showed that:
- Barnsley has the 4th highest average caseloads in the region (excluding disabled children's cases)
 - At the time Barnsley had the highest rate of children subject to formal Child Protection Plans aged 0-17 years per 10,000 population. However it should be noted that this spike reduced to 65 per 10,000 in 2016/17 and was 46 per 10,000 in Q2 2017/18.
 - Whilst numbers of formal Child Protection plans ended, the Service is still working with children on statutory, Child in Need plans, who are on the edge of care and edge of care proceedings.
 - At the time of running the report, Barnsley was ranked as the 11th out of 15 authorities with the lowest number of children in care.
- 3.10 Reported average caseloads do not report the highest allocated caseloads, or the lowest. Experienced Social Workers can have greater numbers than the reported average, as well as inexperienced Social Workers having lower numbers.
- 3.11 Social work workloads cannot just be understood by volume. The complexity of work as well as the experience of the Social Worker; the quality of supervision and appraisal, accessible management support and guidance, as well as workforce development and the general operating environment, are all critical factors.
- 3.12 Whilst the operating environment in Barnsley is very positive (as reported in the Children's Social Care (Business Unit 3) 'Investors in People' Gold Assessment Award) and arrangements are in place to help mitigate against high caseloads, Children's Social Worker caseloads in Barnsley are high in comparison to regional colleagues and, higher than the national average of 16 reported by the DfE in February 2017.
- 3.13 Direct feedback from Children's Social Workers in Barnsley is that caseloads are too

high and need to be lower. This has been reported in the 2016 and 2017 Social Work Health Check Survey and is raised routinely by staff in direct discussion with Managers and through their trade union representatives.

- 3.14 Ofsted inspections of children's services are now routinely reporting on social work case loads and there is a risk that despite the significant improvement in performance that has been made in Children's Social Care in Barnsley, we may not achieve a 'good' judgement, as it is well evidenced that high caseloads do impact on the quality of safeguarding services.

4.0 Consideration of Alternative Approaches

- 4.1 In order to tackle the operational impact of high, average social worker caseloads in Barnsley, the following 3 options are outlined for Cabinet's consideration:
- 4.2 OPTION 1. The average full time equivalent (FTE) Social Worker (SW) caseload at the end of September 2017 was 20.5 (excluding Adoption, Fostering and the Disabled Childrens Teams).
- 4.2.1 In Option 1, a proposed reduction of caseloads in the Adoption, Fostering and Disabled Children's Teams, from 20.5 to 18 cases per FTE Social Worker would require 9 (or 8.7) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £376,550 (or £41,839 per Social Worker).
- 4.2.2 In Option 1, to reduce caseloads in these teams to the DfE average of 16 cases per FTE Social Worker, would require 18 (17.7) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £753,100 (or £41,839 per Social Worker).
- 4.3 OPTION 2. The average FTE caseloads of Social Workers at the end of September were 21.7 (excluding Adoption and Fostering Teams but not the Disabled Children's Teams).
- 4.3.1 In Option 2, to reduce caseloads in these teams to 18 cases per FTE Social Worker would require 14 (or 14.47) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £585,746 (or £41,839 per social worker).
- 4.3.2 In Option 2, to reduce caseloads in these teams to the DfE average of 16 cases per FTE Social Worker, would require 25 (or 25.1) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £1,045,975 (or £41,839 per social worker).
- 4.4 OPTION 3 Across all Children's Social Care teams the average FTE caseloads at the end of September was 20.4.
- 4.4.1 In Option 3, to reduce caseloads across all Children's Social Care teams to 18 cases per FTE Social Worker would require 12 (or 11.9) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £502,068 (or £41,839 per social worker).
- 4.4.2 In Option 3, to reduce caseloads in these teams to the DfE average of 16 cases per FTE Social Worker would require 24 (or 24.4) additional Social Workers, at an estimated cost of £1,004,136 (or £41,839 per social worker).

5.0 Proposal and Justification

5.1 This proposal recommends OPTION 2, namely to reduce Children's Social Work caseloads (excluding Adoption and Fostering Teams) to an average of 18 cases per FTE Social Worker in the Assessment, Safeguarding, Disability, Children in Care and Care Leavers Teams, which would require 14 (14.47) additional Social Workers to be recruited at an estimated cost of £585,746 (at £41,839 per social worker).

5.2 In addition to benchmarking Social Work caseloads nationally and regionally, social work activity, effectiveness and efficiency have been scrutinised by the Service Director for Children's Social Care & Safeguarding and Executive Director of People. There is clear evidence, i.e. National and local performance indicators that the service is performing well, that thresholds are well understood and effectively applied and that social work activity is well managed. This is evidenced by:

- The rates of Children in Need (CIN) per 10,000 - all open cases to Children's Social Care, in Barnsley remains lower than statistical neighbours and national rates.
- The rates of children's statutory assessments are comparable with national rates and below statistical neighbours.
- In Quarters 1 and 2 (2017/18) 99% of assessments were undertaken within the 45 day national timeframe.
- The rate of children on formal Child Protection Plans is now below Statistical Neighbours.
- In Quarter 2 only 1 child was on a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time and only 1 child was on a Child Protection Plan for 2 years or more.
- 100% of children have their Child Protection Plan reviewed on time.
- The current 12 month performance shows that 98% of children on a Child Protection Plan are visited by a Social Worker within 4 weeks of the Plan or previous CP visit.
- Barnsley's rate of Looked After Children (LAC) is well below Statistical Neighbours and National rates.
- The current 12 month performance shows that 98.1% of LAC cases were reviewed in time.
- Performance management information and monthly case file auditing shows that open Child in Need (CIN) cases are children on the edge of formal child protection procedures and/or on the edge of care.
Performance management information and deep dives of cases shows that CIN cases are open for approximately 13 months; this is a reasonable period of time to either reduce risk or, escalate into formal child protection processes.

5.3 However, in supporting the Service to be considered as 'Good' among peers and Ofsted, this is an opportunity to re-set caseloads and through smaller volumes, thereby improve, firstly, outputs, such as a further increase in the completion of timely assessments and, secondly, improve productivity by enabling social workers, in Children's Social Care and Safeguarding, to focus more on evidence and

relationship based practice, as part of an enhanced response to meeting the needs of children in need of help or protection, leading to better outcomes.

6.0 Implications for Local People and Service Users

- 6.1 Manageable social work caseloads provide the capacity to respond even better, to children in need of safeguarding and statutory services, including children in care. Manageable social work caseloads provide increased opportunity for evidence based interventions and relationship based practice, where maximum time is directly spent engaging with children and families, enabling Social Workers to really understand a child's needs, experiences and the impact of harm, to help make the right decisions for children at the right time.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 It is estimated that 14 (FTE) additional social worker posts are required to reduce the average case load per social worker from the current 21.7 to 18 cases per FTE. This is based on the total number of social worker posts in the approved staff structure of all the social care teams, excluding adoptions and fostering teams.
- 7.2 The full year cost of 14 additional social worker posts is estimated at £585,750 (based on the mid-point cost i.e Grade 9) with recruitment into the new posts expected to commence in the current financial year. Recurrent funding for these additional posts will be addressed through the Council's revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) .

8.0 Employee Implications

- 8.1 The implications of this proposal will reduce caseloads and work load pressure for social work employees in front line child protection and children in care teams. Team Managers will have an increase in the numbers of direct reports, however, arrangements will be put in place to support and militate against this.
- 8.2 Details of the current structure of the relevant services, together with the new, proposed posts, are shown in Appendix 'B' (i-iii) of the report.

9.0 Communications Implications

- 9.1 There are no communications implications directly arising through considering this report.

10.0 Consultations

- 10.1 Social Workers and their representatives have been consulted regularly in respect of caseloads and the support that managers were providing to front line practitioners. Whilst staff recruitment, retention and morale has remained very positive, business planning activities and the Annual Barnsley Social Work Health Check confirmed that this was a concern for some Social Workers.

10.2 The Council's Senior Management Team has been consulted on the recommendation in this report and is supportive of the proposed investment in additional social workers in order to reduce caseloads. The Service Director (Finance) and Service Director (Human Resources and Business Support) have been directly consulted on the financial implications and the proposed additions to the workforce, upon which the trade unions have indicated their support.

11.0 The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

11.1 This proposal supports the Corporate Priority of People Achieving their Potential and will maintain the crucial outcome of children being safe from harm.

12.0 Promoting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

12.1 This proposal will have a positive impact for all Social Workers in the specified front line teams and for all vulnerable children, irrespective of their characteristics, who require statutory social work services and for whom any specific needs will continue to be met.

13.0 Tackling the Impact of Poverty

13.1 The proposal supports improved outcomes for vulnerable children living in compromised and impoverished conditions.

14.0 Tackling Health Inequalities

14.1 The proposal will continue to support the strategic objective within the Barnsley Children and Young People's Plan of improving health outcomes for vulnerable children and those who are in the care of the local authority as part of closing the gap with peers.

15.0 Reduction of Crime and Disorder

15.1 Ensuring vulnerable children receive the help and protection needed to safeguard them reduces the risk of crime and disorder.

16.0 Risk Management Issues

16.1 If the proposal is approved, the appointment of additional staff will increase the number requiring direct supervision by front line managers, but arrangements will be put in place to support and mitigate against any risk through the Service's business/workforce planning and performance review procedures.

16.2 Subject to approving the recommended option, both the Senior Management Team and Cabinet will be kept informed of the progress made in tackling high, average caseloads via the Corporate Plan quarterly performance reports.

17.0 Health, Safety and Emergency Resilience Issues

17.1 There are no implications for the health and safety of the public or employees arising through considering this report.

18.0 Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights

18.1 The proposal recognises the EU’s guidelines for the promotion and protection of children’s rights, notably through protecting children from harm and by promoting equality.

19.0 Conservation of Biodiversity

19.1 There are no implications for the conservation of biodiversity through consideration of this report.

20.0 Glossary Of Terms And Abbreviations

20.1 None, applicable.

21.0 List of Appendices

21.1 Appendix ‘A’: Financial summary costs and arrangements for funding this proposal.
Appendix ‘B’: Current Service Structures and summary of additions to the workforce
Appendix 1: Regional Benchmarking Data On Local Authority Children’s Social Work Caseloads

22.0 Details of Background Papers

22.1 Background papers used in the compilation of this report are available to view by contacting Mel John-Ross, Service Director (Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding) People Directorate, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, PO Box 639, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S70 9GG

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Financial Implications/
Consultation <i>(to be signed by senior Financial Services Officer where no financial implications)</i>