

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES) TO CABINET

NATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION SCHEME FOR CHILD AND FAMILY SOCIAL WORKERS: EVALUATION OF THE PHASE TWO PILOT IN THE BOROUGH

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of an evaluation of the recent piloting of the National Assessment and Accreditation Scheme (NAAS) for Child and Family Social Workers' within the Borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That Cabinet notes the outcomes emerging through the piloting of the NAAS in the Borough and the benefits to be accrued in the quality of practice.**

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Under Part 2 of the Children and Families Act (2017) Social Work England was established as the independent regulator for children's social work with the following objectives:
- To protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public.
 - To promote and maintain public confidence in the children's social work profession, including professional standards.
- 3.2 As part of this, a national post-qualifying standard for child and family social work expertise was introduced in order to provide a nationally consistent benchmark to which all local authorities will be encouraged to align their performance management systems.
- 3.3 Standards were to be measured through the voluntary roll-out of the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) which would provide nationally recognised staging points in social workers' careers. This would also help build the managers and leaders of the future.
- 3.4 Until the introduction of the NAAS, there had never been a national expectation for child and family social workers to reach advanced levels of practice, knowledge and skill which is formally examined and accredited, as is the case in so many other professions. The closest which child and family social workers had to specific, systematic, specialist post-qualification accreditation, in England, was for the role of Approved Mental Health Practitioner and for Best Interest Assessors (*although both accreditations are not exclusively for social workers*) with the only systematic

approach to post-qualification accreditation being the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).

3.5 Purpose Of The National Assessment and Accreditation Scheme (NAAS)

3.6 NAAS provides a clear career pathway for frontline social workers with an unequivocal message to employers about the importance of embedding effective social work practice across the workforce. Employers are encouraged to extend their training and development offer in order that their child and family social workers have the knowledge and skills they need to achieve accreditation.

3.7 The Department for Education has estimated that the value of the accreditation of social workers is set to cost £3.5million with a contractor appointed to create a clear framework and delivery structure to ensure assessment roll-out for approximately 1,200-2,300 social workers between January 2018 – March 2020.

3.8 The national delivery programme for the NAAS is characterised by the following:

- Assessment centres within local areas
- Recruitment and training of assessors and observers
- Recruitment and training of volunteers for simulated observation
- Preparing and expanding a pre-existing digital platform to be ready for roll out
- Design and implementation of a system for releasing feedback to employers and individuals including a database for securely storing results
- Design and implementation of a system for dealing with the re-taking of tests, of concerns, queries and appeals
- Work alongside an independent research partner and the DfE to understand and action change requirements where required over the contract period.

3.9 The DfE developed a rigorous system based on the proposed Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for assessing child and family social workers in order to gain accreditation as frontline practitioners and practice supervisors. The NAAS will include four stages of assessment, as follows:

- Stage 1: direct practice observation by the employer – in the workplace over a period leading to the practice endorsement;
- Stage 2: an assessment of knowledge;
- Stage 3: an observed interactive practice simulation in a controlled environment with independent examiners;
- Stage 4: a written assessment linked to the simulated observation but assessed separately to the observation sessions.

3.10 NAAS Early Adopter Pilot Programme

- 3.11 Before progressing to a full national rollout, the NAAS was introduced initially through an early adopter pilot programme with 31 local authorities signed up to the first Phase Pilot in 2017/18.
- 3.12 The learning gathered from the Phase 1 Pilot programme to date has helped to understand what support is needed to help social workers and employers engage with practice and development needs against the post qualifying standards (KSS). Pilot local authorities have reviewed and streamlined internal systems against the KSS, including performance management, appraisal and audit systems, supervision and training, as well as providing support to their child and family social workers to familiarise themselves with the KSS and understand them in the context of their day-to-day work.
- 3.13 In October 2018, following publication of Ofsted's inspection report on the inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Services, the DfE invited Barnsley MBC to participate in the second phase of the pilot scheme and the Council subsequently joined the scheme on 1st April 2019.
- 3.14 Local authorities who volunteered to take part in Phases 1 and 2 of NAAS were awarded an early adopter grant from the DfE to prepare both their social workers and their systems for the new Scheme. For Barnsley this amounted to £140,200. The grant provided funding for a Practice Lead Officer; administrative and research capacity and the participation of each participating Social Worker, including the accreditation and assessment process and a re-take/appeal, where unsuccessful.
- 3.15 The NAAS Phase 2 pilot in Barnsley ran from the 1st April 2019 until 31st March 2020 when it was suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.16 In agreeing to formally participate in the NAAS Phase 2 pilot programme, Barnsley were required to:
- Support the wider aims of NAAS including; assisting the whole workforce to become more familiar with the KSS and to give consideration to career progression of which NAAS would form a part.
 - That senior leaders from within the Local Authority support the initiative: the DfE operate a twice yearly DCS forum and will be looking to increase involvement with the national Principal Social Workers' network in future, with whom the Local Authority has a strong relationship.
 - The DfE expected Barnsley to participate in independent research which is tracking how well NAAS is working.
 - The DfE expected Barnsley to endorse 20-30% of social workers in post to be assessed within a 12-month period. We identified that 138 children's social

workers were eligible to be assessed under the NAAS, translating to a target of between 28 - 41 social workers.

- 3.17 In addition to the grant, Barnsley had access to a self-service information library. The DfE made available information and learning gathered to date as well as access to the organisation acting as the delivery partner.
- 3.18 As NAAS encourages employers to improve their professional development offer to social workers to help embed the post qualifying standards (KSS), the Local Authority would receive information on: Project Management; Communications; Example questions; Guidelines for creating local practice questions; Practice endorsement tools: Career pathways and strategic workforce planning.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1 Evaluation of the Phase 2 Pilot in the Borough

- 4.2 Barnsley's Children's Social Care Service has retained a stable workforce, with no reliance on agency social workers for over three and a half years. The Service has become over the last few years an employer of choice in the Region and is able to successfully recruit and retain our workforce. Our workforce is well balanced, with a good mix of both newly qualified and highly experienced social workers. Feedback from both the latest Barnsley MBC Employee Survey and the Annual Principal Social Workers Health Check Survey are extremely positive. The Ofsted inspection in 2019 reported that, *'workforce stability is excellent' and that 'staff morale is high, and staff are proud to work in Barnsley. They are positive about the support, guidance and training they receive and the visibility of senior managers'*.
- 4.3 The DfE grant funded an internal secondment for the position of NAAS Manager, which was offered to an existing Team Manager in the Service, who prepared and supported children's social workers through the assessment and accreditation process. A part time internal Administrator/Research Officer was also recruited and funded via the DfE's Early Adopter grant.
- 4.4 The leadership approach to implementation has been to work **with**, prepare and support those social workers who volunteer and identify themselves with their line manager, to be ready to participate in the assessment and accreditation process. There has been a strong message of support and encouragement to the workforce from the senior leadership team, including support and endorsement from the Service Director within social care forums and in written communication and one Head of Service being in the first cohort to sit their NAAS accreditation.
- 4.5 Attendance by members of the Children Social Care Service's senior management team and the NAAS Manager at workshops run by the DfE and its delivery partner, including access to DfE toolkits gave an insight into how other authorities had implemented the national social work knowledge and skills statement (KSS) and

NAAS and enabled discussions around the model that Barnsley wanted to adopt to roll out accreditation.

- 4.6 Having a stable workforce and managers who know staff well has meant that Barnsley has been able to adopt an approach to practice endorsement that has had minimal impact on workload or existing pressures. Managers discuss and agree with staff during supervision that the individual is, in line with the national social work Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS), an appropriate candidate to sit their accreditation and complete an endorsement form. The NAAS manager and lead, the Head of Service for Children and Family Services and Service Manager for the Children and Young People's Teams were the first to undertake their assessments in June 2019, leading by example.
- 4.7 The NAAS manager and lead, along with line managers, identified a small group of practitioners and one team manager who volunteered to be in the first cohort to sit their accreditation. Preparation workshops were developed, based around the KSS and preparing for the accreditation process. These were offered at times and locations that were convenient to staff, to enable attendance and engagement. Throughout the process, these workshops have been reviewed and amended following feedback from staff and this has been an integral part of developing the offer. A bank of resources has been developed and shared with staff. Feedback has been consistently positive, with staff reporting that the sessions and resources were helpful and informative. Posters and laminated cards reflecting the KSS were produced and distributed to all offices and staff.
- 4.8 Through attendance at team meetings, presentations at the all service, Children's Social Care Development Forum, roll out of a regular newsletter and meetings with interested individuals or small groups, all Children's Social Workers who have successfully completed their ASYE (first assessed and supported year in employment) and have support from their managers have been given the opportunity to learn more about and sit their accreditation. Staff have been given the opportunity to prepare for and sit their accreditation with colleagues or on an individual basis, with opportunities to link with colleagues across teams.
- 4.9 There have been underlying key messages embedded into the roll out of NAAS in Barnsley, including the following.
- KSS underpinning of social work practice
 - The significance of the practice endorsement and that any social worker who is endorsed and put forward to sit their accreditation has the confidence and support of the agency.
 - Preparing for NAAS is about having time to reflect on the job that we do and the knowledge and skills that we are using daily.
 - The support that is on offer to staff, both pre and post assessment

- 4.10 A support offer was developed and shared across the service, setting out the support available to staff both pre and post assessment and results, including a response for anyone not meeting the criteria.
- 4.11 Accreditation Rates In Barnsley
- 4.12 The DfE target for accreditation of 20 - 30% of the workforce equated to 28 – 41 qualified social workers in Barnsley. By the end of March 2020, 76 qualified social workers, including social workers, team managers, service managers, independent reviewing officers for children in care and child protection co-ordinators from all service areas across Children’s Social Care had sat their accreditation.
- 4.13 At the time of writing this report, 71 practitioners have had their results, with 68 of them achieving a successful ‘met’ outcome. This is the highest percentage to date of all participating local authorities. Barnsley has also engaged with the research programme, having the highest response to the online research that was sent to all qualified social workers, informing the lessons learnt and development of the future national implementation.
- 4.14 We have reviewed our CPD and training offer in line with the KSS to identify any gaps and develop resources to ensure our social workers have access to appropriate training and development. The training offer has been revised and training is mapped against the specific domains of the KSS. Staff all have access to and have been encouraged to utilise Research in Practice, who have developed a map of their resources linked to the KSS.
- 4.15 Over the last 12 months we have reviewed and aligned our Social Work Career and Progression Pathway with the NAAS, and from February 2020 this has been offered as a route to progression, with social workers having two options to progress to experienced or senior social worker - one being a portfolio route and the other involving NAAS accreditation.
- 4.16 Barnsley Children’s Social Care have exceeded the DfE target for the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) Phase 2 Pilot 2019/20 of Children’s Social Workers who successfully achieved accreditation.
- 4.17 The DfE target for accreditation was 20 - 30% of the children’s social work workforce equating to 28 – 41 qualified social workers in Barnsley undertaking the accreditation assessment. By the end of March 2020, 76 qualified social workers, including social workers, team managers, service managers, independent reviewing officers for children in care and child protection co-ordinators from all service areas across Children’s Social Care had sat their accreditation.
- 4.18 At the time of writing this report, 71 practitioners or 93.42% had met the NAAS Standards and this is the highest percentage to date of all participating local authorities.

- 4.19 Barnsley has also engaged well with the research programme, having the highest response to the online research that was sent to all qualified social workers, informing the lessons learnt and development of the future national implementation.
- 4.20 The work completed within this period around embedding the KSS has been evidenced through the numbers of practitioners achieving NAAS accreditation and reflects our Self-Assessment for Ofsted and of our children's social care workforce, with the workforce demonstrating high levels of competence and professionalism in their interventions, with the overall aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.21 Barnsley's children's social care training and development offer will continue to be aligned with the KSS, thus promoting best practice, positive outcomes for families and enabling access to training in line with individuals needs identified in line with their role within supervision and PDR's. Data mapped against the KSS derived from NAAS results will enable managers to identify areas of development for individual staff. This individual data has been collated and will be used to identify any wider themes of training and development for children's social workers in Barnsley.
- 4.22 Early feedback around the embedding of the KSS evidenced via NAAS within career grade progression for social workers has been positive and NAAS will continue to be offered as a route to progression for eligible social workers, and as such will be considered with staff in supervision and PDR.
- 4.23 The uptake of NAAS in Barnsley means that every Childrens Social Care service has several NAAS accredited practitioners and an accredited manager, and as such the KSS is discussed regularly, within teams and in supervision during case discussions and personal and professional supervision. This model will enable the continued embedding of the KSS within practice and roll out of NAAS post the funded period.
- 4.24 Resources remain available on SharePoint to all staff. Preparation workshops will be offered on a rolling monthly basis to staff who are validated and booked on to their accreditation. Initially, these will be facilitated by the previous NAAS lead, with support from the workforce development team and interested practitioners and managers.
- 4.25 The current COVID19 pandemic has resulted in a postponement of NAAS accreditation dates and at present there is no timescale for when these will be reinstated. Four staff who had booked on had their bookings cancelled and these will be rescheduled. It is not envisaged that the current pandemic will have a long-term impact on the proposal to continue the roll out of NAAS.
- 4.26 Conclusion
- 4.27 Barnsley Children's Social Care Service have engaged well in this pitot and have exceeded DfE targets. This is reflective of our operating environment and culture, where there is high morale, motivation and high support within the service.

Reputationally, our engagement has been highlighted and acknowledged by the DfE and England's Chief Social Worker for Children and Families, Isabelle Trowler.

4.28 We have prepared our workforce well, should the NAAS be implemented nationally, aligning it to our training, progression and workforce development offer, CPD and annual appraisals.

4.29 In passing the NAAS, practitioners have informed us that it has increased their existing sense of pride and confidence in themselves as 'professional' social workers. It has confirmed to them that they are well placed, and have all the skills, experience and knowledge, to practice and deliver services to a high standard.

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

5.1 There has been no need to consider any alternative options in this report as its purpose is solely to report upon the evaluation of the NAAS Phase 2 Early Adopter pilot in the Borough.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

6.1 Our experience through the Phase 2 Pilot will provide further assurance to children, young people and families who are in need of help or protection, of the quality and calibre of children's social work in the Borough, together with the benefits which a stable children's social care workforce, including leadership and management, can bring to the provision of this vital service in Barnsley.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 A grant, amounting to £140,200 was awarded to the Authority by the DfE via the Early Adoption Fund in order to facilitate the piloting of the NAAS in the Borough in 2019/20 financial year. The costs charged against the grant funding include the following: the designated Service Manager costs, business support recharges, travel expenses (mileage, public transport), printing, and other general expenses associated with delivering the programme.

8.0 EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The objective of the Phase 2 Pilot has been the augmentation in the quality of child and family social work practice in alignment with the proposed national standards. The role of local NAAS Manager was recruited to via an internal secondment and the temporarily vacant post was backfilled for the duration of the pilot programme. No further employee implications emerged as a result of the Phase 2 Pilot.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 No legal implications are likely to arise through consideration of this report.

10.0 CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications for the range of channels through which communities can currently access Council services or for the onus towards digital transactions, emerging through this report.

11.0 COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no communications implications concerning this report other than to note that the positive experience which the Phase 2 pilot has elicited provides further assurance to children, young people and families in the Borough, together with interested stake holders, of the quality of practice within child and family social work and the professional standards with which it is compliant. This will form part of the Local Authority's Self-Evaluation to be submitted to Ofsted in preparation for the next Annual Conversation.

12.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 The Council's Senior Management Team has been consulted, firstly on the decision to take part in the Phase 2 Pilot and secondly upon the evaluation of its effectiveness. Nationally, whilst there remains some concern among trade unions over the costs and effectiveness of the NAAS, the local branch of the trade unions were consulted on our participation in the Phase 2 pilot and on this basis, supported our involvement.

13.0 GLOSSARY

- 13.1 Not applicable.

14.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

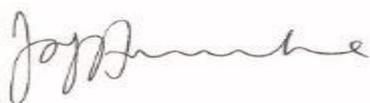
- 14.1 There are no appendices to this report.

15.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

Report author: Deborah Mercer (Service Director: Children's Social Care and Safeguarding)

Financial Implications/Consultation



Joshua Amahwe (20/05/2020)

(To be signed by the senior Financial Services officer where there is no Appendix A)