

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

15 April 2015

Modernising Children's Social Care

Report by Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and Director of Family Operations

Executive Summary

The County Council has identified Giving Children the Best Start in Life as one of its top three priorities. Critical to achieving this is the provision of good quality social care services. This report outlines the challenges facing the Children's Social Care Service both in terms of national and local factors, and goes on to provide information about the work being undertaken to transform the service into a more modern, fit for purpose organisation. The scale of the transformation is significant. It will impact on all areas of service delivery and on all roles within the structure. It is ambitious in its intent to create a context within which 'good' social work practice can flourish.

The new service model is the result of not only professional input from staff and managers, but also the learning from innovative consultation with children and families who have direct experience of the service. The new service model is designed to provide the best environment within which we can improve outcomes for children and families, develop social work practice, retain staff and maximise the benefit of being one of only ten local authorities involved in the national 'England Innovations' project embedding the 'Signs of Safety' methodology.

Focus for Scrutiny

Modernising Children's Social Care is a significant undertaking and whilst there are clear opportunities to improve the service provided to children and families in West Sussex, there are risks associated with the process of moving from one service model to another. Actions are in place to mitigate the risks, but they cannot eradicate them. The Committee is invited to ensure that it is satisfied that the arrangements in place are sufficiently robust to ensure the on-going safeguarding of children and families and that those arrangements are likely to provide an appropriate base from which to implement the new service model.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to

1. Support the redesign of the Children's Social Care Service as outlined in this report
2. Support the Cabinet Member for Children – Start of Life to
 - seek ongoing funding for the provision of embedded administrative staff beyond the current year
 - seek funding for the academy to provide support to newly qualified social work staff
3. Agree how and when the Select Committee will monitor implementation of the restructure
4. Consider the role of elected members in supporting the work of Children's Social Care Services

1. Background

- 1.1 The Children's Social Care Service in West Sussex is currently rated by Ofsted as providing an 'Adequate' service. This rating was achieved following an inspection in March 2013, and was the result of a major improvement initiative. The service had previously been rated as 'Inadequate' when inspected by Ofsted in 2010.
- 1.2 The County Council has made a clear commitment to improving the quality of services to children and families and has identified 'Giving children the best start in life' as one of the top three priorities for the Council, within the 'Future West Sussex' Plan. Within the overall objective of service improvement, the Council has stated that it is aiming to achieve a 'Good' rating at the next inspection by Ofsted.
- 1.3 To achieve this next level of improvement, a thorough review has been undertaken of the service and, as a result, a major restructure of the service is now underway. The specific objectives of the restructure are to deliver a new service model which can produce the outcomes for children and families identified in the Future West Sussex plan –
- Improved physical and mental health of children and young people
 - Families receive the support they need early
 - Children are safe and secure
 - Young people are ready for school and ready to work
- 1.4 The restructure is being managed by senior staff within Children's Social Care with support from colleagues in Business Change, and progress is closely monitored by the Start of Life Programme Board.

2. National context

- 2.1 Nationally Children's Social Care Services face continued scrutiny and higher expectations, whilst maintaining the emphasis on keeping children safe and wherever possible helping them to remain in their families. Changes in legislation have introduced new timescales for specific aspects of support to children, including decisions relating to permanence for children looked after who are unable to return to their immediate family.
- 2.2 Recent reports have helped to raise awareness of the significant risks of sexual exploitation faced by children and this has highlighted the need for a greater focus on this within the work of protecting children.
- 2.3 Following several high profile child protection cases, the Government commissioned Professor Eileen Munro to review the current arrangements in England. Her report made recommendations which were accepted by the Government and indicate a different approach is required around describing and managing risk.
- 2.4 Crucially the role of Social Workers within Children's Social Care has been under scrutiny recently. There is a growing recognition that the national shortage of experienced and suitably qualified social workers is not a short term issue. This, together with the learning from the recent report by the

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families regarding improving the quality of social work practice, has resulted in the need for the way in which social workers are managed and supported to be revised in order to recruit and retain high quality staff.

- 2.5 The Ofsted annual report (March 2015) identified the following key features in good performing authorities
- Social workers working directly with children and families at an early stage to prevent the need for further intervention and that both Managers and social workers have a clear grasp of key issues within cases at all times.
 - Managers have strong oversight of caseloads, vacancies, and a high quality of training and supervision
- 2.6 In West Sussex, as nationally, the Children's Social Care Service is delivering services in the context of these changes and pressures, and dealing with the additional challenges of ongoing financial constraints.

3. **Local context**

- 3.1. In conjunction with supporting the journey of moving from achieving an Ofsted rating of 'Adequate' outcomes for children and families to a 'Good' rating, the following local challenges were identified:
- Managing the demand on Children's Social Care, and preventing crisis intervention. Increasing the resilience in our families and communities to support those experiencing difficulties is integral to the early help programme
 - Ensuring more effective outcomes for children in care particularly older Children Looked After in their journey through leaving care. This is being realised with the transfer of this responsibility to the Young Peoples Service which also reduces duplication
 - Reducing the vacancy rates in some parts of Children's Social Care. Current data indicates that social workers who leave certain key areas refer to excess work pressures and poor work/life balance within exit interviews
 - Reviewing of the job roles within Children's Social Care of which some aspects have not been reviewed/revised for some considerable time
 - Reducing silo delivered Services. The redesign has opened opportunities for the development of creative solutions that cross traditional service boundaries e.g. an Adolescent and Families Resource provision.
 - Improving practice in particular areas for example neglect and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
 - Improving the consistency in measuring outcomes and impact
 - Reducing the amount of time social workers and managers spend in undertaking basic administration
 - Improving front line management capacity

4. Improving operational practice

- 4.1. As work progressed on developing the options for organisational change, work was also undertaken on how best to improve social work practice. As a result, West Sussex Children's Social Care has become one of only ten local authorities involved in the national 'England Innovations' project, adopting the 'Signs of Safety' methodology.
- 4.2. Signs of Safety is an approach to child protection work that expands the investigation of risk to encompass the strengths within the family. The approach concentrates on what the family is going to do to ensure the child is safe. This means that although professional interventions are often required to support the family in the short term it is acknowledged that the long term safety is going to come from within the child's family.
- 4.3. The approach works best when social workers are organised within smaller teams and have access to first line managers who are practice orientated and are quickly available to work with staff in order to create a dynamic environment where change is actively sought and encouraged with family groups.
- 4.4. Not only has the Signs of Safety approach been shown through research to be effective, it is well liked by both families and practitioners. Studies show that social workers utilising the approach achieve better job satisfaction and are more likely to remain in front line practice.

5. Staffing

- 5.1. There are three core strands to the approach to tackling the challenge of a shortage of frontline social workers:
 - Creation of an 'academy' model which provides enhanced support in a more structured environment for social workers who are completing their first year of practice. This ensures that they have a firm basis to move forward in providing high quality interventions to families as they gain further experience.
 - Role profiles have been revised and the internal hierarchy has been restructured to ensure that there are opportunities for good social workers to progress. The new role profiles are in line with the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) from the College of Social Work.
 - A dedicated website for recruitment of social workers and frontline managers has been established which sets out the advantages of working within West Sussex
- 5.2. In addition to these steps, and following considerable feedback from staff leaving the service who stated the lack of adequate administrative support as a key reason for leaving, additional administrative staff have been brought in and embedded within the social care service. This initiative, which costs £592,000 per year, has been funded for one year in the first instance, but it is clear that the additional support is having a positive impact on the workloads of social work staff. A business case has been produced which

shows non-cashable benefits of over £2m per annum, and which includes a request for the funding to be provided on an ongoing basis.

6. New Structure

Service Area	Contains
Contact. Assessment & Intervention	Emergency Duty Team, CAP, and Assessment & Intervention Groups
Family Support and Protection	Family Support & Protection including Disabled Children
Resilience and Permanence	Children looked after 0-18years Adolescent & Family Resource
Fostering, Adoption and Intervention	Fostering and Adoption Children & Family Intervention Group
Improving Practice	Successfully embedding strategic frameworks to deliver changes in social care practices Workforce planning initiatives for Children's Social Care

6.1. Each service area is led by a Service Leader, and within the service, staff are managed by Group Managers who focus on strategic and high level practice issues and Practice Managers who focus on day to day operational practice. Sitting alongside the Practice Managers are a small group of Advanced Practitioners whose role is to work with the Improving Practice Service lead to improve practice. They also work on more complex situations with social workers ensuring that practice is effective, timely and consistent.

7. Intended outcomes

7.1. We are seeking to achieve the following success criteria/measures over the long term:

Objective	Measure
Improve the resilience of families	Increase in the use of Early Help plans and improving outcomes measured through these and Think Family targets
Reduce demand on higher cost interventions	Referrals to Children's Social Care reduced over time
Improve preventative support for families	Reduce the number of Children In Need and Child Protection plans over time
Reducing inappropriate referrals and levels of repeat demand	Reduce the number of Child & Family Assessments that go to 'no further action' (currently 62%, 25% come back

	again at least once)
Improve children’s safety	Reduce the length of time of children are on child protection plans
Improving Permanence	Reduce the number of repeat episodes of children being looked after
Improve the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers and frontline managers	Reduce the number of temporary/agency staff and improve the length of time qualified social workers remain in West Sussex
Improve Service Planning through better measurement of feedback and outcome measures	Increase user feedback and work with families to improve the way we develop our practice.

8. Alternative Options Considered

8.1. The option to do nothing was considered, but rejected as continued operation of the old structure would result in: -

- ongoing unsustainable spend on temporary staff
- restricted potential to improve the quality of practice and therefore achieve an Ofsted rating of Good
- inability to respond to increased demand
- continued silo working

8.2. As outlined in this report, the new service model is the result of considerable consultation and the need to accommodate new approaches to social work practice. The effectiveness of the structure and processes will be subject to ongoing review and adjustments will be made as necessary to ensure the desired outcomes can be achieved.

9. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee

9.1. The Committee is asked to consider the information provided about the Social Care Service Redesign, in particular the risks identified and issues about ongoing funding as identified in the risks and resources paragraphs.

9.2. Members are asked to consider how and when they wish to monitor delivery of the changes and achievement of the desired outcomes. This could be by provision of a report to the Committee or by establishment of a Task and Finish Group to undertake more detailed scrutiny of implementation.

9.3. Members of the Committee are asked to consider how individual elected members can support the work being undertaken by Children’s Social Care Services.

10. Consultation

10.1. The Children’s Social Care Service redesign is the result of an extensive co-production process with children, their families and staff. The service utilised expertise from the Design council to undertake an innovative approach to gathering the views of children and families who had direct experience of the care service in West Sussex. This identified considerable learning which has

been integrated into the new design, in terms of the structure, workforce development and early help.

- 10.2. Staff were engaged in a number of events to gather views and then develop the new service model.
- 10.3. In addition to consulting children, families and staff, there was also engagement with the West Sussex Safeguarding Children Board, partners through the Start of Life Partnership Board, and head teachers.
- 10.4. Throughout the consultation and design phase, the principles of fairness, equal opportunity and the diversity of communities have been a significant consideration.

11. Resource Implications and Value for Money

- 11.1. The new service model has been designed to operate within the overall budget of the Children's Social Care Service and should be financially sustainable, once fully implemented. The funding available is sufficient to cover the cost of the social work staff required within the service. In the short term there will be a need to cover vacancies with temporary staff, the cost of which is higher.
- 11.2. The funding has been made available to cover the costs of embedded administrative staff for the current financial year, but no commitment has been made to fund this support beyond March 2016. As mentioned in para. 5.2 above, a business case is being produced for the inclusion of this funding in the budget on an ongoing basis.
- 11.3. There are costs associated with the establishment of the academy to support newly qualified staff. These costs have not yet been finalised, but are likely to be around £0.5m on a one-off basis. A bid on the Council's reserves will be made to cover both this and any additional one-off costs of employing temporary staff while vacancies in the new arrangements are filled on a permanent basis.

12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1. Whilst the purpose of the restructure is to establish a more appropriate and resilient service, the process of moving from the old to the new structure presents considerable challenges and a number of risks.
- 12.2. Potential disruption to the service –
Careful work has been undertaken to prepare the workforce for the transition from the old model to the new model and to minimise the level of disruption for staff and therefore children and families. Social Workers were not asked to apply for their jobs rather to indicate two preferences as to where they would want to work within the new model. This has resulted in approximately 10% of the current workforce opting to move role.
- 12.3. Risk of staff shortages in terms of both skills and numbers –
There are a number of social workers wanting to take advantage of promotional opportunities and whilst this is positive in terms of maximising

the benefit of their experience and developing career paths, there is likely to be a negative impact on capacity at the operational social work level. To offset this, the existing temporary workforce will be deployed so as to equalise resources across the service and ensure minimum staffing and skill levels are met. This will be supported by a detailed risk analysis of not only numbers of all practitioners but also their skills and experience.

- 12.4. It is anticipated that the new processes for recruiting Social Workers and frontline managers will take effect over this year but staffing levels will continue to be an area of risk. Current vacancy levels for qualified staff are 14.8% average across the service and 18.3% in hardest to recruit area.
- 12.5. Rise in demand –
There is a risk that a number of factors such as the greater awareness of CSE could result in an increase in demand on the service at a time when it is in transition and more vulnerable. Demand is monitored closely so that managers are aware of any particular pressures, but the capacity to respond is likely to be more limited during the transition phase.
- 12.6. Ofsted Inspection –
If an inspection were undertaken during the transition period there could be a negative impact on the capacity of the service to implement the changes and on overall staff performance if uncertainty is created by the inspection process. This risk is mitigated by the enhanced support to be provided within the new structure, but the vulnerability remains until the transition process is complete.
- 12.7. Financial and reputational risk –
There is a risk that the time it takes to embed the new service model and therefore deliver the anticipated quality improvements could take longer than anticipated, resulting in failure to achieve a 'Good' rating from Ofsted. Management measures are in place to control the transition and implementation process to minimise the risk.
- 12.8. There is a short term risk that the cost of employing temporary staff to provide adequate cover until sufficient additional permanent staff can be recruited to provide a safe level of service, could be considerable. These will be included in a request for funding from reserves.

13. **Impact of the proposal**

- 13.1 An Equality Impact Report is not required for this report as it is an information report.

13.2 **Human Rights Act**

- 13.3 The reorganisation of the Children's Social Care service will assist the County Council to ensure an appropriate balance in respect of Article 8 Respect for Family and Private Life, and Article 6 – Right to a Fair Hearing and due process in decision making. Having a more effective service model which supports best practice should lead to improved outcomes for children.

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Background Papers: None