

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Social work caseloads and retention:

Action taken to manage social work caseloads and recruit and retain social workers.

17/7/18

Overview

There has been on-going activity to improve social work retention, which has a direct impact on maintaining manageable caseloads across the workforce.

A number of strategies have been deployed to achieve the above:

Recruitment:

- **Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW's)**

All NQSW's take part in a national programme referred to as the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment Programme.(ASYE's) This runs for a 12 month period and supports all newly qualified social workers to develop their skills, knowledge and professional confidence.

Nottingham is recognised as having a strong ASYE programme which offers the workers placements in a variety of service areas to build up their knowledge and skill base and ensure they are equipped to case hold child protection and court work after their first year in employment. Throughout their first year in employment ASYE's have a protected caseload

- **Grow Our Own Programme**

This is a joint initiative with Manchester Metropolitan University providing a 2 year fast-track social work degree course for colleagues experienced in working with children, families and vulnerable adults wishing to qualify as social workers. The second scheme is out to tender with a view to commencing September 2018. Nottingham City will lead this course and a number of other local authorities have expressed interest in joining the scheme sharing the costs. NCC will support a further 10 colleagues on this scheme which will produce a further 10 qualified social workers by the end of 2020. NCC will make a small contribution to the fees of each student and the remainder of the cost will be met by the individual through a five-year career development loan.

There are 22 colleagues on the Grow Our Own scheme that commenced spring 2017.

22 NCC colleagues; 17 Children's and 5 Adults and 4 from Derbyshire. They will complete in June 2019 and their qualification will then be confirmed. Following this, they are then able to register as social workers with HCPC.

- **Bespoke Recruitment.**

This aims to attract more experienced social workers for Duty/Fieldwork and Children in Care. This initiative has had some success in recruiting a small number of experienced social workers.

All of these initiatives have resulted in a decrease in the number of agency staff employed across Children's Integrated Services from over 65 agency staff at it's height to 23 agency workers currently.

Retention:

- **Progression Panels for experienced staff**

Whilst there has been an ongoing focus on developing and supporting Newly Qualified Social Workers, it is equally important to have strategies in place which seek to value and invest in our most experienced staff. Within Fieldwork we are piloting a similar model to our ASYE progression panels. This will then be introduced within other parts of the service

Meetings will be held with every level 3 social worker and senior practitioner which focuses on their development and aspirations and we look at providing them with opportunities to reach their goals. For example, senior practitioners who aspire to be team managers are given options of shadowing team managers and observing formal processes such as Legal Planning Meetings to improve their understanding and application of threshold. In addition senior practitioners are acting as Mentors for less experienced staff which provides them with the opportunity to develop and fine tune their skills in this area but also contributes to the development of social work staff who themselves aspire to become senior practitioners.

- **Practice Improvement Days**

These are a relatively new development across Children's Integrated Services. Every 4-6 weeks senior managers and team managers across Duty, Field, Children In Care ,Whole Life Disabilities meet to focus on an aspect of practice which needs strengthening or has been highlighted as an area for action within the audit or Serious Case Review process. This has been effective in ensuring consistent and standardised practice across children's social care. It serves to make a difference

to children's lived experiences since these developments strengthen safeguarding systems and processes across the whole Directorate. This collaborative approach between managers from different parts of the service also serves to motivate staff since team managers can directly influence this process and feel valued as a result. They see first hand how the investment in these areas impacts on practice improvement. This model is also being replicated across Early Help.

- **Practice Supervisor Development Programme**

Research in Practice (RiP) is developing the Practice Supervisor Development Programme.

The Practice Supervisor Development Programme (PSDP) is a Department for Education funded initiative. It is intended to enable Practice Supervisors to develop the knowledge, skills, personal resilience and confidence to effectively undertake their role of supervising, supporting and developing excellent frontline practice with children and families. The course is intended to reach approximately 700 newly appointed Practice Supervisors.

There are ongoing discussions about how this will operate but it is envisaged that each local authority will nominate 3 practice supervisors (team managers or senior practitioners within their first year of practice) to take part in this programme over the next 2 years. This is a great opportunity and a significant investment in newly appointed Practice supervisors who will receive regular support and opportunities to develop their supervision practice and this can be shared with other managers within NCC. This initiative will be supported by NCC and provides further investment in managers which in turn should impact positively on retention.

Commitment to maintaining manageable case loads

In Nottingham, retention rates improved over the previous 12 months and our commitment to ensure we have a stable workforce has a corresponding impact on case holding. At times of reduced staffing, this remains challenging. However this a key priority and case holding is frequently reviewed by senior managers. All managers have daily access to a suite of reports containing information in relation to case holding. Strategies are utilised when required to support teams who have high number of allocations. This involves transferring work to neighbouring teams.

Caseholding data:

Currently the average caseholding across the whole of social care workforce (duty/fieldwork and children in care) is approximately 17 cases per worker. However this

number is slightly higher for our experienced social work staff when the ASYE cohort is deducted since they have a protected caseload of no more than 15 cases.

There are current pressures due to gaps in both fieldwork and duty but a number of these will be covered between July and September when the new ASYE's join Children's Integrated Services

Ofsted inspection:

We expect to receive an Ofsted inspection during 2018 where we will be able to demonstrate the improvements made to practice, the impact on outcomes for children and continued 'Good' services delivered by our committed skilled social work workforce.

As previously reported, Ofsted Inspectors (during the Pilot Inspection in January 2017) commented positively on all of the work NCC has undertaken to recruit and retain social work staff and stated that Nottingham City Council was now an Employer of Choice and the local authority has successfully created an environment where social work practice can flourish.

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