



# Northumberland

## County Council

### Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

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#### **Annual Report of the Principal Social Worker - Su Kaur**

Report of Cath McEvoy-Carr, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Guy Renner-Thompson

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**1. Purpose of report**

To advise and update the Scrutiny Committee about the input and work of the Principal Social Worker in 2019/20 and an overview of the quality of practice and development needs of frontline social workers.

**2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- 1) The Committee acknowledges the contents of the report and the work that has been completed over the last year.
- 2) Members agree the priorities and identify any further areas for scrutiny or challenge if required.

**3. Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the 'Being Safe and Feeling Valued' priority included with the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-21 and NCC Children's Service Statement 2019/21.

**4. Key issues**

- Impact of COVID on practice and service delivery
- Recruitment and retention of children's social workers
- Manageable caseloads
- Practice improvement

## 5. **BACKGROUND**

5.1 The role of the Principal Social Worker is to take a professional social work lead across the organisation to influence strategic decision making, respond to national initiatives and take part in developing a body of knowledge that supports front line practice.

5.2 Part of this function is to provide feedback to key groups including elected members. A report was provided by the Principal Social Worker to FACS (Family and Children's Services) Scrutiny meeting in January 2019. This included information about activity relating to recruitment, staff training and development, caseloads and practice improvement. This report will elaborate on those themes and outline the plan for 2020/21.

### 5.3 **Workforce**

#### 5.3.1 Facts/figures

Northumberland Local Authority Social Work Workforce statistical information data is provided to the Department of Education on an annual basis. The reporting year runs from October to September. The graph below at 5.3.1a provides information submitted Nov 2020.

##### 5.3.1a

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>NCC Oct 19 to Sept 20</b>	<b>NCC Oct 18 to Sept 19</b>	<b>National figure (18-19)</b>	<b>Regional figure (18-19)</b>
<b>a) Turnover Rate</b>	14.7% (33 individuals)	12.7%	15%	14%
<b>b) Agency Worker Rate</b>	9.4%	4.9%	16%	8%
<b>c) Vacancy Rate</b>	9.7%	9.3%	16%	8%
<b>d) Days lost to sickness absence</b>	1903	2433		
<b>e) Absence Rate</b>	3%	4.9%	3%	3%
<b>f) Caseload average at 30-09-20</b>	15	17	17	18

5.3.2 The turnover rate remains slightly lower than the national/regional average however higher than the previous year. Of the 33 leavers - 30 were permanent staff and 3 agency staff.

5.3.3 As per the graph below at point 5.3.3a - 4 staff members applied for and were successful for posts in Adopt North East, which is the adoption agency, combining adoption services from 5 LA's regionally. 3 of these members of staff previously worked within our internal Adoption Team.

5.3.3a

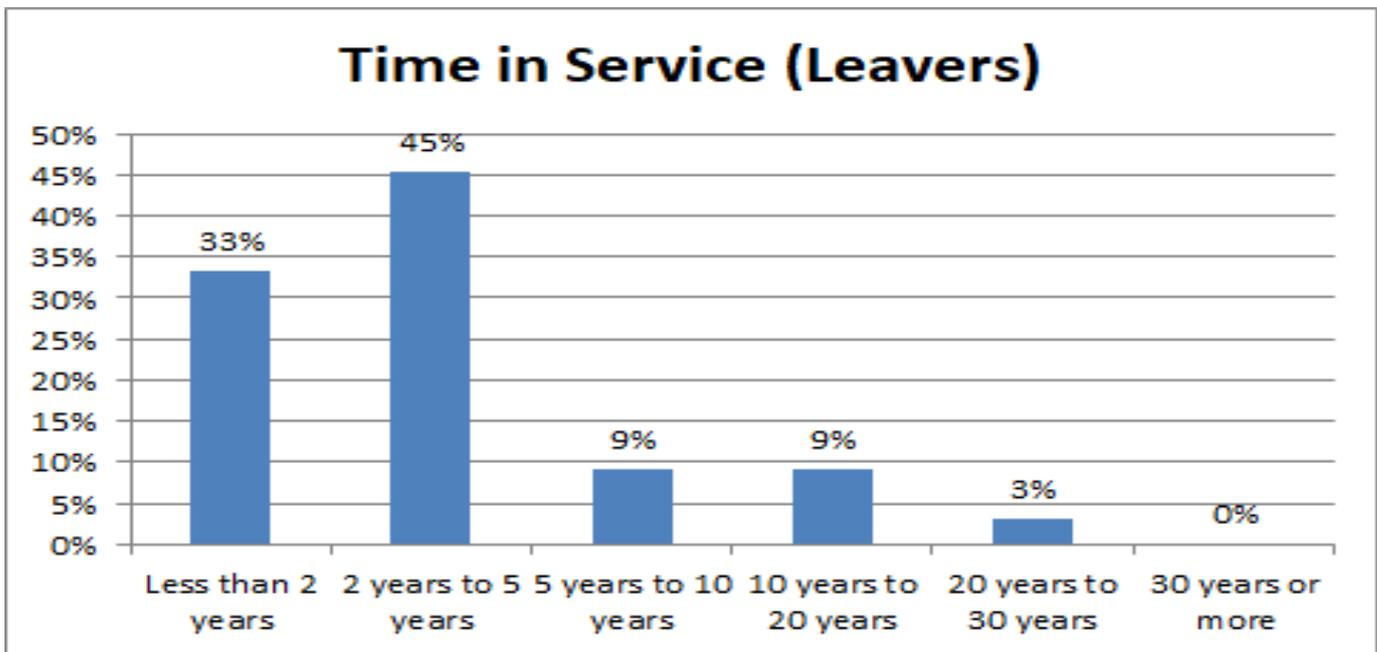
Transferred to another LA	12
Deceased (not work related)	1
Retired	3
Promotion in OLA (within children's social care)	1
Moved out of area	4
Moved to adult social care	1
Moved to adults (not social care)	1
Transferred LA to a different role	3
Transferred to Adopt North East	4
No longer in Social Care	2
Promotion (not in social care)	1

5.3.4 Ten Social workers who left to work in other Local Authorities were based in the Safeguarding Locality Teams. These teams manage very complex, serious child and family cases. In line with thresholds, a number of these children have or may have suffered significant harm. The emotional impact on staff who work in this particular sector can be high. Unfortunately transferring to other Local Authorities to fulfil the same role is often a sign of staff starting to feel 'burnout'. Please see the graph at 5.3.6a below.

5.3.5 As per the graph above at 5.3.3a, there were also a number that have left children's social work in its entirety.

5.3.6 Nationally there has been a 4% increase of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) child and family social workers in post at 30 September 2019. However, as per the graph below (5.3.6a) sourced from the Department for Education's Children's National Workforce Data Report (27th February 2020) during the year ending September 2019, 68% of FTE child and family social worker leavers had been in service in their Local Authority for less than 5 years. This percentage remains the same as 2018.

5.3.6a



5.3.7 Our process in Northumberland includes an exit meeting between the leaver and their line manager prior to departure.

5.3.8 In order to fully ascertain the reasons for staff departures, Human Resources personnel ask all leavers to complete an online exit questionnaire which remains anonymous. Of the 33 leavers, 10 completed the questionnaire. The main reasons for leaving were cited as; retirement, seeking more job satisfaction, seeking higher salary, seeking work life balance.

5.3.9 It is endeavoured this information will assist in identifying themes. Monitoring and evaluating this data will assist in us taking corrective actions to alleviate this recurring issue.

5.3.10 A number of experienced workers choose to work for social work agencies and historically due to local demand they have been in a strong position to command high rates of pay. In a bid to take control of the market the regional workforce leads have continued to work collaboratively to ensure the cap of charges payable to agency staff is adhered to.

5.3.11 This has also provided consistency of key worker for children and families. Another benefit has been consistency of team building, peer support and stability, which is vital in this service area due to the emotive issues which safeguarding children can bring. This is particularly relevant in the current climate due to the pandemic. Please find further information regarding staff wellbeing within the wellbeing section (9.7).

5.3.12 The workforce return table illustrates that Northumberland's reliance on agency staff has increased since last year. This is in part due to maternity cover.

- 5.3.13 COVID and the impact on staffing has also dictated the use of agency staff where some staff have had to isolate/or work from home, concerns of hidden harm remained in the forefront of service delivery therefore it was imperative to ensure the frontline workforce were available to fulfil the role.
- 5.3.14 Agency staff are only utilised when all other avenues have been exhausted. This includes fully utilising the role of social work support assistants and back office support.
- 5.3.15 Sickness absence is a key priority for the Council and Children's Services. With COVID there were apprehensions around staff absence however it is testament to our social workers/managers that the sickness rate was significantly lower than last year with 530 days less. This indicates a willingness and resilience to safeguard the children of Northumberland to the best of their ability. Every effort was and is made to remain in regular close contact by line management and peers alike to support each other during this time.
- 5.3.16 As a leadership team we have continually focused on staff wellbeing throughout the pandemic. We have addressed and monitored sickness absence.
- 5.3.17 The graph below at 5.3.16a provides the reasons recorded for sickness leave (period Oct 2019 to Sept 2020). A significant percentage is due to emotional health. On average 1 member of staff was off sick for 25 days.

5.3.17a

<b>Absence Reason</b>	<b>FTE Lost days</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Stress, Depression, Mental Health & Fatigue Syndromes	874.08	35
Other Musculo-Skeletal	268.45	12
Other	183.1	8
Infections	142.56	28
Stomach, Liver, Kidney & Digestion	88.24	36
Neurological	84.31	11
Chest & Respiratory	79	7
Cancer	76	1
Back & Neck Problems	46.4	4
Eye, Ear, Nose & Mouth/Dental	35.31	8

Pregnancy Related	29	3
Operation Musculo-Skeletal	28	2
Genito-Urinary/Gynecological	5	1

- 5.3.18 A health and wellbeing roadshow was held in October 2019 to coincide with the flu jabs to raise awareness of the impact of sickness related absence and also promote a positive message about personal responsibility for health
- 5.3.19 The caseload average figures indicate a downward trend from last year and well below national and regional averages. However, complexity of cases has not reduced. To the contrary, this reflects the significant work that is being undertaken to manage demand at the front door and apply appropriate thresholds and also step-down cases without delay once interventions have been offered. COVID has brought about additional challenges to service delivery due to the pressures placed upon families and practice due to this unknown phenomenon.
- 5.3.20 A caseload weighting system is utilised to reflect the complexity of work in a more meaningful way than purely reporting on case numbers. This tool takes account of number of children, distance to travel (Northumberland does have challenges due to the geographic vastness of area) complexity of the case issues and administrative work required to provide a more helpful comparator.
- 5.3.21 The workload weighting system shows 80% of Practitioners were working at or below capacity in January 2019. This has improved from 73% however the aim is for this to be 100%.
- 5.3.22 The staff with additional workloads are concentrated in the 14 + Team, the South East and Central Safeguarding Teams. These teams are also characterised by higher sickness and agency workers and turnover. These teams are prioritised for placing newly recruited experienced staff into them. The staff structure will be reviewed regularly alongside the recruitment strategy to determine what changes are needed in line with requirements.

## 5.4 Recruitment

- i. Recruitment and development of Newly Qualified Social Workers has been successful and will continue to develop within Northumberland Children's ASYE Academy in 2021.
- ii. Current routes into the Academy include successful completion of a BA or Master's degree via local universities and the DfE Step Up to Social Work initiative. Further routes will include the BA Social Work Apprenticeship Scheme - a new initiative which commenced in 2019 with a start date in 2022 within the Academy.

- iii. Recruitment of experienced staff remains a challenge which impacts differentially in some services.
- iv. Recruitment of experienced staff is both a national and regional issue with all Local Authorities in the North East experiencing similar difficulties. Ongoing attempts have been made to address the issues however the pandemic has impacted this somewhat. We remain part of the regional recruitment initiative 'Put Your Heart into Social Work in the North East'. This focusses on the benefits of working in the region.
- v. We signed up to Return to Social Work in November 2019 with placements commencing July 2020 and when COVID occurred we signed up for 'Social Work Together'. Unfortunately, both of these routes both locally and regionally proved unsuccessful. It seems the pressures of COVID and the associated risks around frontline social work impacted interest in joining Children's Social Work.
- vi. The well-intended national Programme - 'Return to Social Work' was interrupted by COVID. Due to lockdowns and the national premise being 'work from home unless absolutely necessary to prevent contagion' we were restricted in terms of offering the re-registration requirements of in-house placements (30 days for those out of the profession for 2 to five years and sixty days for those out of the profession for 5 to 10 years).
- vii. The Social Work Together Programme led by our registering Body - Social Work England (SWE) entailed SWE automatically re-registering previous social workers who did not re-new their registration within the past 2 years (up to March 2020). Again, the uptake has not been forthcoming.

## **5.5 Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE)**

- 5.5.1 Since the previous Annual Report, Northumberland Children's ASYE Academy has supported another 33 new starters into post. September 2019 Cohort saw 8 new starters and March 2020 Cohort saw another 8 new starters. Such are the benefits and successes of this Model, we scaled up to 17 new starters for the September 2020 Cohort. This Academy model continues to support the transition from academic study by offering high support *and* high challenge to ensure social workers keep children at the heart of everything they do during and after transition to experienced social worker.
- 5.5.2 Newly qualified staff in the Academy are offered a comprehensive support package which includes:
  - A thorough induction (Corporate and social work specific) for each Cohort
  - Since scaling up we have expanded the Management support accordingly to ensure the ASYE's receive the same high level of accessibility to effective, approachable line management. We have 2 x Academy Team Managers, a Deputy Team Manager and a Senior Practitioner who are dedicated to

supporting the 2 Teams currently in their 0-6 months juncture of the 12 months programme.

- 5.5.3 Regardless of the challenges faced due to COVID, every effort has been made to continue the offer of a thorough, structured training programme and graduated caseload to ensure these Cohorts are fully supported to develop their skills.
- 5.5.4 Whilst COVID has greatly impacted staff regularly working/attending their office bases, every effort (COVID safe by socially distancing and wearing masks as applicable) has been made to provide an opportunity for the newly qualified Cohorts to commence their careers as a 'Cohort'. The invaluable peer learning and open office conversations with managers is a key aspect of effective social work action learning during their first 6 months in children's social work.
- The workers have and will continue to transition to Safeguarding Teams for the following 6 months of the ASYE programme. This will include a mix of working virtually and attending the office during Duty days and Team Days. Again, every effort has and will be made to ensure staff are working 'COVID safe'.
  - Support continues from the Academy Team Managers, Deputy Team Managers and the Senior Practitioner until completion of the Portfolio. This includes Practice Assessor responsibility and regular reflective supervision. I am also fulfilling the role of Practice Assessor for 3 of the September 2020 Cohort in order to fully support and monitor the high level of practice expected of the social workers.
- 5.5.5 The benefits of the Academy Model adopted since 2018 have been realised as the ASYE's who have commenced their career via this route describe a positive experience. This is also noted in subsequent recruitment; demonstrated by the large volume of applications for a place within the Academy.
- 5.5.5 Timing of recruitment is aligned with university/course completion in order to ensure Northumberland attracts 'the best candidates'. Some candidates who provide particularly strong application forms, evidencing their transferable skill set and desire to support children and families, are interviewed prior to full completion of their degree and offered a post as a social work support assistant within Locality Safeguarding Teams.
- 5.5.7 It is also an opportunity for new appointees to network and build relationships whilst offering support to 'pressure point' teams.
- 5.5.8 Unfortunately Covid has impacted the next Cohort (which should commence March 2021) due to a 4 month delay in final sign off at University. This will now be April 2021.
- 5.5.9 Once a student has passed, they then need to register with Social Work England (approximately 10 days) and DBS checks/references also need to be factored in, which can take up to 2 months.

5.5.10 All of the above is a challenge in an already pressurised environment. However, the decision to scale up to a Cohort of 17 in September will help to mitigate this unprecedented situation.

5.5.11 Since 2018 our Academy has supported the transition of 48 newly qualified social workers. OFSTED recognised the positives of the Academy, citing:

*Significant financial investment by the council has resulted in a strong and valued academy for newly qualified social workers that oversees their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE). This has enabled a culture of high support, protected caseloads and enhanced learning opportunities for social workers. Newly qualified social workers are trained to practice in accordance with the local authority's chosen social work model that underpins some very positive engagement and interventions with families.*

5.5.12 A significant amount of work has been completed by all of our staff; from our admin support, support workers, social workers and managers (at all levels) to ensure positive outcomes for our children and families of Northumberland, as recognised by the OFSTED 2020 rating of 'Good'.

## **5.6 Staff Retention**

5.6.1 To ensure continual recognition and encouragement of staff, we hold a graduation ceremony for all staff who have completed their ASYE. Practice Assessors are also invited and acknowledged for their part in developing the ASYE's. These events are usually well received with attendee staff saying they feel recognised and valued. Unfortunately, COVID 'hit' the day prior to our 2020 graduation ceremony therefore we were unable to formally recognise staff at this significant event. However, every opportunity to encourage and support staff to grow, is utilised to build morale and resilience, especially during these testing times.

5.6.2 Due to careful development and recognition of their skillset, our Academy Alumni have successfully transitioned into experienced Social Workers and one has transitioned into the Advanced Practitioner role currently seconded to the Academy. This is testament to the Programme as an Alumni from Cohort 1 of the Pilot Academy is now proactively role modelling future opportunities for his peers.

5.6.3 However, we fully recognise it is imperative to support staff to 'walk' before they 'run' in order to ensure we continually support children and families here in Northumberland. We have focused heavily on our 'learning culture for staff' which I will discuss further on.

5.6.4 We are extremely conscious of the regional and national issue around a shortage of experienced children's social workers. Therefore, it is envisaged Northumberland's 'Grow our Own' model of effective, confident, competent practitioners will continue to be a route to assist in addressing the local shortage of experienced social workers.

- 5.6.5 We have further developed this route by proactively partaking in the development regionally of the BA Social Work Apprenticeship.
- 5.6.6 September 2019 saw the first 3 Apprentices join the Programme within Northumberland Children's Services. We intentionally selected internal applicants to recognise and support staff who have shown a loyalty and commitment to working for Northumberland Council. This is in line with the Northumberland's Corporate Plan mandate - *'regardless of age, have the right qualifications and skills to secure a good job that pays well and provides the prospect of a rewarding career'*.
- 5.6.7 September 2020 saw another 3 Apprentices join the Programme from internal routes. A Mentor role is required as part of the Programme. We identified and encouraged Managers and their Social Workers to fulfil this role as part of their Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It is important to always consider and implement CPD opportunities for social workers to continually develop their practice within a number of forums.
- 5.6.8 We have strong positive working relationships with Higher Education Establishments through the Teaching Partnership, supporting students to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge in preparation for being part of our future social work force. We offer high quality placements and this in turn provides an opportunity to further develop current staff by supporting social workers to become Practice Educators.
- 5.6.9 In turn it is also beneficial to have a pool of 'seasoned' practitioners once they have completed their studies. This is evident in the high number of students who have successfully transitioned (via a thorough recruitment process) into a permanent social work post.

## **5.7 Wellbeing**

- 5.7.1 As discussed retention of experienced staff is critical to maintain low turnover rates. Regardless of COVID, Children's Safeguarding Teams commonly experience staff moving on after a short period of time as they feel burned out or stressed by the type of work and its associated demands. Year ending September 2019, nationally 5,300 child and family social workers left the role at their Local Authority.
- 5.7.1a Notwithstanding the above, COVID has had a significant impact on our staff. Overall, our Social Workers have been tenacious and resourceful in their approach during these unprecedented times. A 'can do' attitude has been prevalent during this 'crisis' regardless of the concerns around themselves as professionals and all that this entails, as well as factors which impact on their personal lives. All of this tests resilience which is borne from a balance between the personal and professional.

- 5.7.2 A report within Community Care Inform (a Social Work Information Portal) looked at the impact on practice in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.7.3 *Social workers are continuing their work of supporting families and protecting children. It is possible that during this pandemic social workers (and other practitioners) will have their own first hand experiences of trauma and are very likely to experience secondary trauma as a result of the increased incidences of abuse, poverty, mental illness, and all the additional challenges arising out of the crisis. More than ever, it is vital for practitioners to acknowledge this is a hazard of helping and take time for self-care.*
- *'Our workforce is predominantly made up of females'. Women are more likely to exhibit symptoms than men, but it may be that case that men are less likely to talk about emotions and mental wellbeing.*
  - *Length of service may be a factor. Those who are new to the profession and have not yet developed an effective means to deal with the trauma they are seeing, or hearing are at risk. Conversely, very experienced workers are at significant risk because of the accumulation of trauma over years of service.*
- 5.7.4 Considering all of the above and the concern Children's Social Care staff carried around 'hidden harm' due to reduced access to the child's lived world/experience and vulnerable primary carers (domestic violence) we have made every effort to support social workers as professionals by supporting wellbeing. This is in line with our Corporate Plan 2018-21 Involving staff in '*Creating a healthy and positive working environment*'. Pg. 4 CP 2018/21.
- 5.7.5 Social workers are also experiencing concerns about COVID and the impact this has had and is having on their own lives. With this in mind we asked staff to complete a wellbeing survey (May 2020) in order to gain further insight.
- 5.7.6 In terms of what Northumberland Children's Services is doing well; the top 3 responses were all around 'connections' to their Social Care Community, in some capacity. These consisted of:
- Regular general communication
  - Regular Team catch ups
  - Regular line manager catch-ups
- 5.7.8 When asked what we as an Organisation can do more of; the top 3 responses from Children's Social Care (CSC) were:
- 'None of the above'
  - Provision of testing
  - Recognition of the additional work that has been put in by staff

- 5.7.9 When considering the above, information sourced in September 2020 suggests the Organisation Representatives have continued to do the top 3 'well'. In terms of what the Organisation could do better, provision of testing has *not* been highlighted as an issue.
- 5.7.10 In order to continually listen and in turn understand social workers experiences nationally as well as locally, they are also encouraged to complete a national Health Check (Dec 2020). It is an important barometer for the Department for Education to understand national workflow and barriers to effective practice and in turn important for us to build upon worker strengths and take corrective actions as required.
- 5.7.11 Staff wellbeing across the whole of Northumberland Council remains a priority area. This is specifically important due to the pandemic and the offer has been adapted accordingly, providing virtual forums.
- 5.7.12 Targeted support has been offered to social workers/managers via 2-hour virtual sessions with a focus on:
- Stress management, emotion management techniques, work life balance activity, self-care and self-esteem activities.
- 5.7.13 There are numerous corporate wide opportunities accessible to social care staff and staff are encouraged to partake. These include amongst others; Online fitness classes Apps. Staff mental wellbeing Network. Choir. A monthly calm space which provides tips for mental wellbeing.
- 5.7.14 There is also access to Occupational Health for staff to engage with as required. Managers are being encouraged to recommend and refer to Occupational Health proactively for staff who are in work to prevent sickness rates increasing with resulting absenteeism.
- 5.7.15 The social work force demographic is also considered, and staff are encouraged to attend relevant staff network meetings for LGBTQ, Autistic Spectrum Disorder staff network, BAME and Menopause and Andropause staff network.

## **5.8 Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

- 5.8.1 Social Work England (SWE) took over regulation of social workers in England from the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) on 2nd December 2019. Social Worker is a protected title, and it is against the law to practice as, or take up a post of a social worker without being registered with the new body. The new regulator developed a set of practice standards and code of conduct by which registered social workers must adhere. While the previous regulator renewal was every 2 years, SWE require social workers to renew registration on an annual basis. CPD is a prerequisite for renewal of social worker registration.

- 5.8.2 In order to maintain and develop our workforce, Northumberland, in line with our learning culture ethos, continues to offer comprehensive and fully funded training and CPD opportunities (albeit virtually due to adapting to the current situation).
- 5.8.3 We review our training/learning plan on an annual basis during consultation with frontline practitioners/managers to understand what actually impacts/nurtures practice and more importantly what creates positive outcomes for children and families. National themes are also considered to inform our offer. We also offer competitive salaries and graded career structures.
- 5.8.4 The Advanced Practitioner has been effective in terms of addressing pressure points in the service, whilst offering a career pathway for those experienced staff who want to remain in practice and not move into management positions.
- 5.8.5 The implementation of the staff development structure recognises and encourages staff to develop expertise in specific areas of practice, acknowledging this with an Advanced Practitioner status. Further development of this role will ensure Northumberland has 'champions' in their given service area interest/passion, resulting in CPD via regular research and dissemination of knowledge to staff across Children's.
- 5.8.6 This role is complemented by a Deputy Manager role which provides an alternative management career route for those interested in this as a form of progression.
- 5.8.7 Quality assurance has been developed further, incorporating practice days to fully understand the worker experience. We continue to include all levels of staff and the use of peer audit to ensure everyone understands their role as a leader, taking responsibility for their own practice and supporting others also, in line with our Leadership Pledge around accountability, offering high support and constructive challenge.
- 5.8.8 Improvement in practice standards continues by building upon initiatives around:
- Retention/restructure
  - Continued CPD and learning offer
  - Workforce strategy
  - Regional workforce links

## **5.9 Practice and issues which impact social workers**

- 5.9.1 Practice development and improvement is one of the key functions of the Principal Social Worker; offering high support and high challenge in order to continually develop staff.
- 5.9.2 During 2019/20 the leadership team have continually worked on the Improvement Plan. Participation by myself and senior representatives from Social Care, Early Help, Performance Team, Health and Education and the LSCB, assists in providing a comprehensive audit programme which measures the impact of the

improvements. During 2019/20 a range of themed and standard audits have been completed and the process has been continuously refined and adapted to explore different areas of practice. This has been recognised by Ofsted.

*'Leaders make good use of the improved performance and quality assurance framework. Learning from audits, practice days and complaints enables leaders to review progress and the impact of practice on children's experiences effectively. A recent review of auditing has led to the focus of future audits moving from one of compliance to one of quality. Early indicators are that this new model provides an improved focus on identifying learning opportunities for staff'.*

- 5.9.3 The audits have identified some key areas for further improvement, and these are fed back to the work force and related training put in place. The next task within the audit plan is to track the direction of travel in specific areas to monitor progress. Impact on practice and outcomes for children and families continues to be a key theme moving forward.
- 5.9.7 There is access for all social workers/social care staff to a web-based children's social care research site. (Community Care Inform) In collaboration with the 12 Local Authorities regionally, the same research tool has been commissioned. It is envisaged this will/has assisted in consistency and standardisation of practice and resourceful whilst considering financial prudence.
- 5.9.9 It is crucial to provide a common set of principles and a practice framework within which social workers can practice with confidence. Signs of Safety (SoS) which is a recognised model of social work intervention had been utilised. Training is refreshed.
- 5.9.10 There is regular attendance by a SoS Consultant and practice champions identified and appointed from across all areas of social care practice.
- 5.9.11 Senior managers are role modelling the use of this approach in order to instil confidence to frontline staff. Effective communication is key to ensuring consistency of message to all areas, especially here in Northumberland where staff are dispersed over a large geographical area. A monthly SoS Newsletter and SoS discussions are set as a regular agenda item during Team Meetings.
- 5.9.12 The benefits of this approach are being seen however there is still some way to go for full implementation of this evidence-based approach to practice, that unifies social work interventions across the service and provides clarity and confidence to the workforce.
- 5.9.13 Participation and attendance at training via the 'Learning Offer' provided to social workers is being developed further to ensure this is resource effective and has the desired effect of continually improving practice.
- 5.9.14 For training where places are numbered, specific social workers are identified to attend and then encouraged to disseminate the learning to their team/s on their return. This is a development opportunity for attendees who improve skills in

identifying key points from the training and presenting/sharing their learning. Every opportunity is utilised to instil confidence *and* accountability in our staff.

5.9.15 Evaluation of impact for children and families is and remains a priority.

## **5.10 Raising the profile of social work nationally and regionally**

5.10.1 I have continued attendance at national and regional meetings as the Chair of the regional PSW Network. I have contributed to and maintained a Northumberland Children's presence in national practice developments. I have also maintained virtual contact with the Chief Social Worker for England and the DfE.

## **5.11 Priorities for 2020**

- Whilst Ofsted recognised the significant progress made, we are keen to further develop ourselves and our practitioners to address areas identified during the Inspection.
- Since January 2020 (Inspection) we have focused on the quality of all child/ren's plans by continually implementing the Signs of Safety Model. We actively encourage staff to work 'with families' in the best interests of their children as opposed 'to families'. As families and networks are the experts of their lives.
- The quality of analysis and more importantly 'impact on children' is an area of continual development.
- We have worked on the overall quality of the recording of management oversight in supervision records.
- Recovery planning to emerge from the pandemic and adapt service delivery and workforce planning in light of the learning.
- We will maintain consistency and momentum of embedding Signs of Safety into all elements of practice and leadership.
- We will continue implementing the Leadership Pledge across all levels of staffing to ensure all staff recognise themselves as leaders, blurring hierarchy as a barrier to positive communication in the best interests of children.
- Further develop a robust and creative strategy for recruitment of experienced staff - to include ongoing retention.
- Review the staffing structure to meet demand across the service.
- Continue to adapt and learn from the quality assurance programme, (audits/practice week) - to ensure all auditors prioritise service user feedback.

- Consider and identify CPD for social workers in line with key national themes and local requirements
- Remain engaged with regional and national social care initiatives to support and influence practice in Northumberland.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

<b>Policy:</b>	
<b>Finance and value for money:</b>	Potential financial implications for training and accreditation costs
<b>Legal:</b>	Performance within the childcare legal cases, care planning and permanence for children as highlighted within the Children's Services improvement plan
<b>Procurement:</b>	Regional research tool - Community Care Inform won the tender
<b>Human Resources:</b>	Staffing, training and development implications
<b>Property:</b>	None
<b>Equalities:</b> (Impact Assessment attached)  Y <input type="checkbox"/> e <input type="checkbox"/> s <input type="checkbox"/> N <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> o <input type="checkbox"/> N <input type="checkbox"/> / A <input type="checkbox"/>	All procedures and policy changes will take account of impact and equalities for all groups.
<b>Risk Assessment:</b>	Risks for Ofsted inspection if improvements and activities not implemented
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder:</b>	None
<b>Customer Considerations:</b>	Positive outcomes for children and families are realised if staff are well trained, supported and motivated.
<b>Carbon Reduction:</b>	N/A
<b>Wards:</b>	N/A

## 7. CONSULTATION

## 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

## 9. Report Sign Off

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	N/A
Executive Director	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

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