



Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Date: 13 July 2006

Subject: Formal response – Recruitment, Retention and Workload of Children's Social Workers

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 During 2005/06, the Scrutiny Board (Children and Young People) carried out an inquiry into the recruitment, retention and workload of children's social workers. The board issued a final report in April 2006.
- 1.2 It is the normal practice to request a formal response from departments to the board's recommendations, once a final report has been issued. A formal response has now been received. This is attached as appendix 1.
- 1.3 Members are asked to consider the response provided, and to decide whether any further scrutiny involvement is required. In particular members are requested to consider the frequency of any future progress reports against the recommendations originally contained in the scrutiny board's report.
- 1.4 In deciding whether to undertake any further work, members will need to consider the balance of the board's work programme.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the response provided and to decide whether further scrutiny involvement is required.

Recruitment, Retention and Workload of Children's Social WorkersProposed Action Plan

| Recommendation | Action taken/proposed | Responsibility | Timescale |
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| <p>Recommendation 1. That the Chief Social Services Officer considers adopting similar practices to those introduced by The Youth Service to carry out induction programmes whilst awaiting CRB clearance.</p> | <p>This induction practice introduced by The Youth Service is for part time Youth Worker posts to work during the evening. Applicants are either already volunteers with the service and/ or have other employment outside of the service which they may retain. The induction is attended on a voluntary basis and consists of 6 x 2 hour evening sessions. Main purpose of this practice is to involve applicants in meeting team members, to keep in touch with / make applicants feel they are being involved in the service pending the return of the CRB check and also so that as they have no notice to work they are able to start immediately they have accepted an offer of employment.</p> <p>It is considered that this practice could not be applied for the benefit of Children's Social Worker recruitment for several reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applicants are drawn from a wide geographical area. 2. The service is provided during normal office hours and applicants are usually in employment and therefore would not be able to attend sessions during coinciding periods. | <p>Peter Sowden – Head of Human Resources (Children's Services)</p> | |

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| | <p>3. Applicants are usually subject to giving notice following receipt of a formal offer of employment.</p> <p>However the department feels that the recent practices that have already been put in place to keep applicants interested and engaged in the recruitment process should be further developed.</p> <p>The practices in place are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Block interviews are conducted for city wide vacancies therefore shortlisted applicants are only interviewed once. Recommended candidates are allocated to service area teams based on a mixture of individual candidate preference and service need.2. All interviewed candidates are seen individually immediately after their interview to check their CRB application form and for the verification and copying of identity documents.3. Each recommended candidate is given a named HR Officer and Area Service Delivery Manager as a contact person.4. Recommended candidate contact details are given to the service area to which allocated who then make their own arrangements with the candidate as required for a site visit, meeting team members, preliminary discussions around starting date and any other issues the candidate or service area manager may want to discuss. | | |
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| | <p>Further developments to be introduced into the process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Improved communication between HR / service area managers / recommended candidates on the progress of the various parts of the vetting process.2. HR to assess starting salaries in parallel to the other stages in the recruitment process to minimise potential disputes with recommended candidates following them receiving the formal offer of employment letter which is the final part in the process. This assessment will incorporate the already introduced increased flexibility around consideration of a candidates experience, roles and salary with other organisations.3. Within 5 working days of receipt of recommended candidates HR to send each a Training pack highlighting the training and development programme for the first year.4. HR to prepare offer of employment letters in advance. This will ensure that on the day of completion of all vetting processes and other checks it will be available for despatch on the same day.5. Upon receipt of acceptance of a post and confirmation of start date send Training and Development information letter explaining training dates and programmes. | | <p>For all recommended candidates from 1 July 2006</p> |
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| <p>Recommendation 2. That the Chief Social Services Officer considers the potential for developing job rotation and secondment opportunities.</p> | <p>This is included as an explicit part of the Children's Services Transformation programme. The part of that programme that relates to workforce reform is the biggest of the four portfolios within the programme. Because we will be considering changes to the structures and formulation of teams, it is best that this aspect be incorporated into that work.</p> <p>Ad hoc requests from employees of the department to participate in secondment opportunities with other organisations will continue to be considered and wherever possible be approved.</p> | <p>Tony Griffin – Head of Children's Service Transformation</p> | <p>Project to run over the next year, though specific proposals about rotations and secondment will be implemented before April 2007.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 3. That the Director of Children's Services, in conjunction with the Director of Legal Services, considers how to appropriately challenge the unnecessary prolonging of care orders.</p> | <p>This is already being actively pursued through various channels. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is already a subject regularly considered in our liaison meetings with Cafcass and with Legal Services, and has featured in papers presented to the Family Justice Council. • There is a protocol with Cafcass that is to be reviewed at our next meeting with them. • We will be using a study event involving all of the Family Court stakeholders (later in the year) to highlight relevant issues. <p>These actions have already led to improvements. For example, the number of successful applications to discharge care orders has increased over the past year.</p> | <p>Tony Griffin – Head of Children's Service Transformation</p> <p>John Colman – Head of Service Delivery</p> | <p>Officers will prepare a report to Members detailing our actions and their impact to be presented in the next six months.</p> |