

# Investment in Children and Families Transition Plan - Children's Social Work Services

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Report of: Deputy Director, Children and Families Social Work

Report to: Director of Children and Families

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## What is this report about?

### Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report seeks investment in children's social work services to improve outcomes for children and to reduce pressures on the service associated with increasing demand.
- The investment approach seeks to build service capacity and meet significant increased demand for statutory services, whilst implementing the Children and Young People's Plan. Proposals address the C&YP ambitions to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children looked after, and deliver outstanding social work and support for vulnerable children and young people.
- This report seeks approval to establish and recruit to new roles within the Children's Social Work Service to ensure that there is adequate capacity to meet current and anticipated demand in relation to occupational therapy, kinship, placements and care leavers.
- Development of the service in line with proposals will both support the city's ambition to be the best place for children to grow up in and contribute to spending money wisely.

## Recommendations

The Director of Children and Families is requested to:

- a) Note the contents of this report and approve the approach to investment in children's social work services set out.
- b) Approve the establishment of new posts as described in this report namely:
  - Occupational Therapy
    - Occupational Therapist SO1 x 1
    - Community Occupational Therapist PO1 x 2
  - Kinship Services
    - Social Worker PO1/3 x 3
  - Placements Team
    - Placements Team Manager PO6 x 1
    - Placement Officer SO1 x 3

- Leaving Care Service
    - Personal Advisor C3 x 4
  - Safe project
    - Family Support Workers C3 x 2
- c) Approve the development of ‘invest to save’ business cases in respect of:
- The Kinship Care Service, to support the promotion of family group conferencing, to enhance placement stability and reduce statutory intervention; and
  - the Leaving Care Service, to support the growth of the service to meet forecast increases in demand

### Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 This report seeks to address resource pressures within the Children’s social work service which is demand-led, reflecting both local and national pressures on demands and costs.
- 2 Ongoing research and analysis has identified that the child population in the cities most deprived areas is increasing at a rate which represents the largest numerical growth of any local authority across the country. The link between poverty and care entry is well established in social work research.
- 3 Whilst the long-term trend has seen a reduction in the number of Children Looked After in Leeds over the last ten years (in contrast to the increase nationally), more recent trends show an increase in Children Looked After in the city.
- 4 The impact of the pandemic on looked after numbers in Leeds is not yet clear. However, in line with other local authorities across the country, referrals to social work services in Leeds increased during the pandemic. Simultaneously significant delays in the family courts have impacted the ability to progress the exit of children from care into permanence options.
- 5 The approach to children’s social work in the city is led by the Children and Young People’s Plan 2018-2023. In particular, the recommendations set out in this report seek to support children to live in safe, supportive and loving families, and to help young people into adulthood, to develop life skills and be ready for work.
- 6 The approach to investment in children’s social work services is designed to support the transition from the Covid pandemic, to continue to improve outcomes for children and, to reduce continuing pressures.

### What impact will this proposal have?

**Wards affected:**

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 7 Recognising the demand pressures within the service, a sum of £1.5 million was identified within the 2022/23 budget to invest in children’s social care. In addition to addressing backlogs in service provision this investment in the service will help to prevent escalating future costs.
- 8 In December 2021 a decision was taken<sup>1</sup> to increase the number of full-time social work posts in the Duty and Advice team by creating and recruiting to 5 new full time social worker posts at

<sup>1</sup> [Council and democracy \(leeds.gov.uk\)](https://leeds.gov.uk/council-and-democracy)

PO1, increasing the number of social work posts to 17 in total, in order to address the increase in referrals.

- 9 In addition, the budget is being used to fund recruitment to ten advanced practitioner posts at PO5 identified as vacant but unbudgeted within the existing structure, providing additional capacity and resilience within the children's social work service.
- 10 This report seeks approval for the establishment and creation of additional posts to develop capacity within discrete areas of the service to address the increasing demand pressure on those services within the wider picture set out above.

### Occupational Therapy Service

- 11 The occupational therapy service provides vital support to children with a wide range of needs. The professional assessment of children allows the provision of equipment and adaptations in line with our ambition to support children in their own homes. Where the needs of children are assessed and met in a timely way, so that children are supported to live at home in their own families, there are better outcomes for the children, and reduced cost to the authority as escalation of care needs are avoided. In contrast, where needs are not assessed and met in a timely way, children's needs can escalate, requiring that the child is cared for away from their home environment with poorer outcomes for that child and their family, and greater costs to the authority.
- 12 There has been a month on month increase in referrals to the OT service, due to population increases and the advances of medical science enabling children to live longer but with very complex needs. We also have a growing population of children needing assessing for adaptations and aids to assist daily living and increased numbers of children with diagnosis such as autism and/or learning disabilities who display behaviours that challenge. Requests are frequently received from families or other professionals for equipment and adaptations that are restrictive in nature. Resolution of these complex issues, in a context of our growing awareness of the Deprivation of Liberty safeguards and current best practice, necessitates significant time and skill by workers.
- 13 Given the current size of the OT team and the fact that they cover city wide there has long necessitated a need for a waiting list. However, this list has now reached 246 children with 180 of these children now being out of the timescale they should be seen; with the oldest referral dating back to 22/9/20. The length of time children are now spending on the waiting list has meant that children's situation has deteriorated, as they have lived for longer without what they need to enable them to function in day to day living. There is a corresponding increase in complaints, enquiries and families being very unhappy at the start of an assessment.
- 14 There is a national shortage of OT's, and this was reflected in recent attempts to recruit temporary OT's to cover maternity leave which have been unsuccessful. In addition, the current structure within the service does not allow for any progression for workers.
- 15 It is proposed therefore to develop capacity within the service to address the backlog of requests for assessment and support, and to meet current and anticipated future demand. Proposals set out below also provide clear routes for progression within the service which will ensure we can keep good staff for longer and enable them to reach their clinical potential.
- 16 **Approval is therefore sought for the establishment of an additional post for an Occupational Therapist at SO1** using the established job description for the role (Appendix A1).

17 **Approval is also sought for the establishment of two additional posts for Community Occupational Therapists at PO1** using the established job description for the role (Appendix A2).

### Kinship Care

- 18 A key priority for Leeds City Council as a child friendly city is to ensure that children can be brought up safely with their birth parents or within their wider extended family network. The Leeds Kinship Care service provides support for carers of children and young people:
- Living in an informal arrangement made by their parents (private fostering)
  - 'looked after' by the local authority and placed with Kinship foster carers
  - On Special Guardianship orders (SGO)
- 19 It is the aim of the service to significantly increase the opportunity for children in Leeds, who may otherwise require stranger foster care, to be cared for within their birth families. The current rate of children being cared for within kinship placements in Leeds as an alternative to stranger care is approximately 29%; significantly higher than the national average of 21%.
- 20 As of 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022 there were 236 kinship households, with 360 approved kinship carers in Leeds, representing an increase of 33% in the last year. The Local Authority is under a statutory duty to these carers with a supervising social worker and to ensure that they receive support and supervision in line with minimum standards. Currently, such standards are not being met due to capacity within the team. Arrangements at present include cases being allocated to
- external providers (with the loss of consistency of service, supervision and quality assurance available in comparison to those allocated in house);
  - Social Work Assistants (supervised by a qualified senior social worker or team manager but nevertheless below minimum standards);
  - Team manager (with consequential impact on team manager's capacity to manage the team)
  - Unallocated
- 21 A regional review in relation to Special Guardianship support focussed on ensuring those foster carers who pursue a special guardianship order (SGO) have access to the same level of support and enrichment as they would if they remained foster carers.
- 22 There are 605 Special Guardianship carers in Leeds and 805 children subject to Special Guardianship, with the kinship service actively supporting approximately 80 – 90 of these arrangements at any one time. It is anticipated, moving forward that this number will significantly increase as a result of the ongoing regional work in this field and the pending SGO support offer in Leeds.
- 23 Referrals for assessment to the kinship service have become increasingly complex in recent years reflecting the authority's shift towards an emphasis on children remaining within their birth families where it is safe to do so. There is a requirement therefore to effectively provide support to families to address any risks or vulnerabilities identified so that they can care for children. This has resulted in more complex arrangements relating to assessment, supervision and support of placements and has impacted upon the number of assessments and support cases that can be allocated to a worker at any one time.
- 24 The kinship care service is made up of skilled and enthusiastic staff who are passionate and knowledgeable about kinship care. The majority are PO3 level workers and have come to kinship care with vital significant experience gained within child protection; placements or children looked after teams. However, there is a need to develop capacity within the service to

ensure that appropriate support can be given to kinship carers, and to prevent the build-up of a bottleneck in the placement service as identified placements cannot be passed to supervising social workers.

- 25 It is proposed that additional supervising social work posts are established, ensuring that approved carers receive support from the very beginning of each placement, and improving placement stability. In addition this would reduce the need for sessional workers and external services, bringing the additional benefits in terms of consistency and inclusion for those carers not residing in Leeds.
- 26 **Approval is therefore sought for the establishment of three additional posts for a Supervising Social Workers at PO1/3** using the established job descriptions for the role (Appendix A3i and A3ii).
- 27 It is proposed that a further invest to save business case will be developed, based on the ongoing integration of the kinship service within early help. Through the promotion of family group conferencing in kinship placements we will be able to support families to lead on decision making around their children. In addition to supporting those kinship carers to whom we owe a statutory duty, this investment would enable the service to support families to co-ordinate their own arrangements away from statutory intervention, reducing the number of children looked after and the pressure on area social work teams.

#### Placements Team

- 28 The Placements Team find places for children and young adults to live from 0 to 25.
- 29 The market for private, non-LCC placements, has become significantly tighter in the recent period as more children come into care nationally. As a result of COVID there has also been a significant pressure on the private and public rental markets. This has caused a significant knock-on loss of capacity in the market and reduced capacity for young people.
- 30 Young people aged 16+ are placed in a variety of different placements, dependant on need. A significant number of young people aged 16-25 are placed within Semi-Independent accommodation. OfSTED announced earlier this year their intention to regulate this provision and this will lead to significant re-alignment and further pressure within the sector.
- 31 In addition, it is noted that there is a significant bulge cohort of Children Looked After in their teenage years, disproportionate to the overall child population, in the city. The high proportion of adolescents in the current (and projected) Leeds CLA population is significant, as this is the age group where there is the most demand and pressure on placements nationally, which has an impact on placement choice, cost and the need to use external fostering and residential placements.
- 32 The high proportion of looked after adolescents, including Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, combined with recent guidance and legislative changes, will in turn expand the cohort of young adult care leavers that Leeds will have responsibility for over the coming years creating further pressure upon the children's social work service. Our work with young adults, leaving care, has grown, with the increase in the numbers of young people leaving care projected to continue over the next 5 years.
- 33 As a consequence of these significant changes and pressures we have identified a need to increase the management and leadership capacity of the placements team, specifically with a focus on accommodation for young people aged 16 and above. New capacity will enable us to steer and lead the sector more effectively, working collaboratively with our colleagues in LCC Housing Options service. In addition, the role will also provide cover for the other manager in the team who will continue to lead provision for children under 16.

- 34 **Approval is therefore sought for the establishment of an additional Team Manager post at PO6** using the established job description for the role (Appendix A4).
- 35 During the COVID pandemic there was a significant pressure in making placements into the private residential and fostering sector. This pressure has continued as, nationally, there has been a significant increase in the number of children looking for placements. As a result, each individual placement is more time consuming to make. The team has therefore lost some of the capacity that was used to review external placements and to support young people to move to family-based care, either with their own relatives or with our foster carers. The team also has less capacity to support existing placements raising the concern that this may lead to a drop in placement stability.
- 36 It is proposed that new posts are established to provide further capacity to the team to support work helping young people move to family-based care, strengthen the capacity of the team to support existing placements and support the team as the 16+ accommodation sector grows and changes as a result of change in regulatory frameworks and COVID related pressures.
- 37 It is considered that the roles and responsibilities within the placements team should be reallocated to provide the additional capacity within the team through the recruitment of placement support officers, supporting existing social workers within the team. **Approval is therefore sought for the establishment of three additional posts for a Placement Officers at SO1** using the established job description for the role (Appendix A5).

#### The Leaving Care Service

- 38 The Leaving Care service works with young adults from 17 to 25 as they move from local authority care to living independently. As a result of the growth in children looked after and in the increase in numbers of unaccompanied children arriving seeking asylum the workload of the team has grown significantly. Modelling for future demand shows that this trend is likely to continue for several years and the service will need to expand its staff size in order to offer the same service to young people as is currently the case.
- 39 It is proposed that a number of new posts are established to support the service in meeting existing demand.
- 40 **Approval is therefore sought for the establishment of four additional posts for a Personal Advisors at C3** using the established job description for the role (Appendix A6).
- 41 In addition, it is proposed that the service develop a separate 'invest to save' business case that will complement this proposal and, with both proposals taken together, will fully support the growth of the service to meet forecast increases in demand. This second business case will see additional funding drawn in to cover rental costs for young adults and allow for the current funding for rental costs to be redirected to increase service capacity. The business case will support additional staff in the Benefits Rights Team, who will support across a number of roles, including with Kinship carers, and a small number of additional posts within the Leaving Care service.

#### Equalities

- 42 An equality diversity cohesion and integration screening has been completed and is attached at Appendix B.
- 43 Arrangements to promote the vacancies will seek to target the audience as much as possible in terms of qualifications, experience and diversity.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 44 The Executive Member for Adults and Children’s Social Care and Health Partnerships has been briefed on the recommendations set out and is in support of proposals but recognises the potential challenge in recruiting to the roles to be established.
- 45 Unions have been advised of the intention to enhance resource within the service and welcomed the proposals. They have said that “... as it is clear that the demands on services are rising and, with the cost of living crisis, only likely to get worse. The investment is welcomed.”
- 46
- 47 Managers and service delivery managers in the service have been consulted on the detail of the proposals; and staff within the service have been made aware of and are supportive of the proposals to increase in capacity within the service.

## What are the resource implications?

### Finance

- 48 A sum of £2 million was identified in the 2022/23 revenue budget to enable investment in both children’s social work and learning inclusion services to meet current demand, and to alleviate anticipated pressures in the future. The proposals set out in this report have been developed in tandem with proposals for the investment in learning inclusion services to ensure that they can be delivered within the budget allocated.
- 49 The table below sets out a summary of costs. All salary costs are budgeted including on costs at the top of scale point for the relevant grade.

Service Area	Post	Grade	Salary	FTE	Overall £
Social Work <sup>2</sup>	Duty and advice social workers	PO1	44,581	5	222,905
	Advanced practitioners	PO5	59,641	10	596,410
Kinship	Senior supervising social workers	PO3	51,524	3	154,572
Occupational Therapy	Community Occupational therapists	PO1	44,581	2	89,162
	Occupational therapists	SO1	38,867	1	38,867
Placement team	Placement team managers	PO6	62,335	1	62,335
	Placement officers	SO1	38,867	3	116,601
Leaving Care	Care Leaver personal advisors	C3	35,419	4	141,676
Total					1,422,528

- 50 The Chief Officer Financial Services has confirmed that the costs can be met within the budget allocation agreed by Council in February 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Approved separately – see paragraphs 8 and 9 above.

## Human Resources

- 51 As a result of the challenges described above, caseloads remain higher than originally intended across the service and this is placing workers under increased amounts of pressure. It is recognised that teams are becoming increasingly demoralised over the last 12 months as backlogs increase. If this is not addressed, in addition to the unacceptable impact on staff wellbeing, it will lead to workforce retention challenges, which in turn will add to the pressures described in this report.
- 52 Whilst the use of sessional staff has prevented caseloads within the assessment teams from increasing as significantly; there is an issue in relation to support of these carers where there is insufficient capacity to ensure that they are immediately allocated to a Supervising Social Worker. As a result carers potentially miss out on the support required within the early stages of placement and this can impact significantly on placement stability.
- 53 It is anticipated that implementation of the proposals set out in this report, together with full recruitment to the existing establishment (set out in the structure chart at Appendix A) will bring caseloads to acceptable levels
- 54 There is sufficient management capacity within the kinship service to accommodate the proposed new posts. The additional team manager post in the placements team is required to provide management capacity within that service.
- 55 Accommodation and equipment needs of staff recruited to the newly established posts can be provided from existing budgets.

### **What are the legal implications?**

- 56 The proposals set out in this report support the authority to meet its legal duties in respect of Children's Social Work, and to provide similar levels of support in the absence of specific legal duties where to do so will further the obsessions, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

- 57 The risks to the authority of not delivering a strategy to reduce backlogs and meet significant increased demand for children's social work services are legal, reputational, and financial.
- 58 Implementation of the proposals outlined depends upon the successful recruitment to these newly established roles. There is a risk that there will be insufficient suitable applicants to fill the roles, however work is ongoing to ensure that roles are widely advertised including extensive social media promotion with paid adverts on multiple channels, targeting our audience as much as possible in terms of, qualifications, experience and diversity. A dedicated children's social work jobs page has also been published, promoting the benefits of working with the service such as flexible working and career progression, and highlighting key vacancies.
- 59 An additional risk has been identified that the new roles may be filled by existing staff, creating vacancies and pressures elsewhere in the service. This has the benefit of retaining staff with skills and experience within the service. Resulting vacancies will be considered and filled in line with the council's policy and procedure.
- 60 The delivery of this strategy is a key priority for the Children and Families Senior Leadership and has the support required from relevant directorates and services areas (Resources, Human Resources, Finance etc.).



## Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

61 The recommendations set out in this report are focussed on delivering the vision, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan. Proposals address the C&YP obsessions to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children looked after, and deliver outstanding social work and support for vulnerable children and young people.

62 In line with the council's Best City Ambition staff will be encouraged to be mindful of the climate emergency in their roles. Systems and processes have been restructured, and IT developed to ensure that officers are able to work remotely, reducing travel demands.

## Options, timescales and measuring success

### What other options were considered?

63 The 'do nothing' option would lead to unacceptable unmitigated risk of delays in allocation of cases and service delivery as set out above.

64 Consideration has been given to a number of options to deliver capacity within the available resource. Having considered existing recruitment and retention issues within the service, the recommendations set out within this report are considered to provide the best solution to the issues raised, providing both capacity and opportunities for professional development within identified services within children's social work.

### How will success be measured?

65 Success will be measured through the reduction of impacts and concerns set out in relation to each service above. This will be evidenced by:

- Relevant performance indicators
- The reduction of backlogs
- Compliance with statutory timeframes

### What is the timetable for implementation?

66 Recruitment to the posts identified in this report will begin as soon as possible in order to address the capacity needs identified.

## Appendices

67 Appendix A: Structure diagrams and job descriptions for posts to be established set out below

Post	Paragraph	Appendix
Occupational Therapist (SO1)	16	A1
Community Occupational Therapist (PO1)	17	A2
Supervising Social Worker (PO1 or 3)	27	A3i & A3 ii
Team Manager (PO6)	35	A4
Placement Officer (SO1)	39	A5
Personal Advisor (C3)	42	A6

68 Appendix B: Equality diversity cohesion and integration screening document

**Background papers**

69 None