

Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds

Date: 27th July 2022

Report of: Director of Children and Families

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

The Social Care workforce is at a crisis point nationally, with employers struggling to recruit to posts. For social work this is exacerbated by fewer people choosing to study social work over the past two years, with universities across the country showing a decline in numbers joining social work courses. This is linked to pressures of working in the Public sector with increased stresses post-pandemic and the Cost-of-Living crisis in the context of more demand for services.

There are particular challenges in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. Three authorities have vacancy rates of over 30% for social work staff ,with one currently employing over 170 agency social workers.

This report provides an overview of the national and regional context, outlines current situation in Children's Social Work Services and outlines the actions taken by Children and Families to ensure that the service is able to support vulnerable children and young people to enjoy good outcomes.

Recommendations

- a) Executive Board is asked to note the assurances outlined in this report in relation to the Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds.

What is this report about?

National context:

- 1 The Social Care workforce is at a crisis point nationally, with employers struggling to recruit to posts. The Health and Social Care Select Committee's [report](#) (July 2022) highlights that the NHS and Social Care face the greatest workforce crisis in their history. For social work this is exacerbated by fewer people choosing to study social work over the past two years, with universities across the country showing a decline in numbers joining social work courses. This is linked to pressures of working in the Public sector with increased stresses post-pandemic and the Cost-of-Living crisis in the context of more demand for services.
- 2 The BASW (British Association of Social Workers) published a summary report of their survey of social workers that showed the key findings below:
 - 71.87% of respondents felt unable to complete their work within their contracted hours.
 - Almost one-quarter of those who felt unable to complete their work within their contracted hours reported working 10 or more additional hours per week, with the vast majority of these additional hours being unpaid.
 - More than one-third (37.13%) of respondents to the question reported that the numbers of people with whom they worked had increased during the pandemic and had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.
 - The biggest challenges facing people in their workplace were considered to be the demands of administrative tasks, the adequacy of staffing levels, workload demand, and access to resources for the people with whom respondents were working.
 - The biggest challenges facing the profession currently and in the immediate future were considered to be the failure to adequately fund social care and cuts to local services, with over 67% citing this as their biggest challenge.
 - Respondents felt that the public perception of social work and social workers tended to be negative.
 - Better promotion of social work with politicians and policymakers was clearly identified as being most important for the development of social work in the immediate future. (The BASW *Annual Survey of Social Workers and Social Work: 2021 – A summary report*, [BASW 2022](#)).
- 3 With more people leaving the profession than joining, recruitment and retention is a significant challenge to all local authorities, with the challenges of recruitment and increased demand on services impacting on workloads.
- 4 Additional [transparency data published by the DfE in May 2022](#) showed that:
 - Of the 3,630 social workers who left permanent local authority social work roles in 2021, 77% left children's social care altogether and 23% moved to agency roles.
 - The majority of those leaving had been in the local authority for less than five years.
 - The highest proportion of social workers who moved into agency roles were aged 20-29 (ie. in the early stages of their careers) (DfE 2022).
- 5 Retention in social work is an increasing concern and nationally, in September 2021, 33.1% of FTE leavers left after less than two years of service, 36.3% left after more than two years but less than five years, and 15.3% left after more than five years but less than 10 years. In

2021, around 60% of children and family social care workers had been in service for less than five years.

- 6 The Independent [Review](#) of Children's Social Care states that a total reset of children's social care is needed. In the first report of the review, Case For Change looked at the most significant challenges facing children's social care and said that the workforce shows signs of "significant strain" and there is "more to do to recruit, retain and support a high quality workforce" (DfE 2022).

Regional context

- 7 The current context within the Yorkshire and Humber region is particularly challenging. Almost one third of Children's Services in the region have been judged by Ofsted as 'Inadequate' (four out of 15). Unfortunately, authorities judged as Inadequate struggle to recruit and retain social workers and consequently they are heavily reliant on agency social workers. One authority in the region is currently employing over 170 agency social workers. Having several local authorities in the region in this position means there is a high level of competition for agency social workers. This has resulted in an increase in the cost of agency staff of around 20% in the last two years. Research done within the region has shown mainstream agency social worker earns around £21,000 a year more than their local authority counterparts. When career development opportunities, pension, holiday entitlement and other benefits are factored in the salaries are comparable. Indeed, as Public sector pay has not kept up with inflation over the past 10 years, social workers have experienced a reduction in their income which makes agency work more attractive.

Local Context

- 8 When Leeds was judged Inadequate by Ofsted in 2010, the Children and Families directorate experienced significant difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers with a vacancy rate of around 25%, which resulted in over five million being spent on agency staff. To address this, Leeds developed a comprehensive workforce development strategy that focused on creating the conditions in which social workers could do best practice. The impact of this strategy was acknowledged in the outcome of the Ofsted inspections of 2015 (Good) 2018 (Outstanding) and most recently in 2022 (Outstanding).
- 9 However, whilst the most recent national data shows that the turnover rate in Leeds is one-third lower than the national average (10.1% compared to nationally 15.4%) and in comparison with other authorities rated as 'Outstanding' (10.1 compared to 13.8%), this is not to say that the workforce in Children and Families is not under pressure.
- 10 There are 378 social work posts across the children's social work teams in Leeds, of which 37 are currently vacant. This is a vacancy factor of 9.7% compared to a national average of 16.7%. Eight of these posts are covered by agency staff, leaving 22 posts vacant. Whilst permission has been given to recruit agency staff for all vacancies, this has not been possible because of the high level of demand in the region outlined above. A further four agency staff will be joining, two in August and two in September. We have also had a successful round of recruitment and 15 are awaiting safer recruitment checks before confirming start dates for the candidates.
- 11 The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on children and young people. There has been a national and local spike in domestic violence and abuse referrals to the police and social care and a rise in mental health needs for adults and children. This, along with the increasing number of children living in poverty in the city (which is up from 47,132 in 2018/19 to 50,727 in 2019/20), has resulted in more families requiring support from Children and Families. In the first

week of July this year 630 children were referred for services to the Front Door in comparison to 588 for the same time last year, an increase of 42 contacts for children.

- 12 As a result, case loads are higher across Children and Families than they were pre-pandemic. This was noted during the recent inspection by Ofsted. Although the average caseload has reduced since the inspection, in January 2022 the average caseload was 21.1 and in June 2022 this has reduced to 20.4. This is still higher than we would like and work to reduce case loads continues.
- 13 We currently have no social workers with caseloads of 40 or above. We have 10 social workers with case loads over 30, two of whom have of caseloads between 35 and 40.
- 14 As a result of the pressure on the service in April 2022 a group of 77 social workers submitted a grievance through their Union in relation to support, work and caseloads, the progression process, pay and benefits. Concerns have been raised about this by opposition councillors and the Leeds Children's Independent Safeguarding Chair. It is important to note that the Council and Children's Leadership team have taken these concerns seriously and actions had been taken or are in train to address the issues raised. These are outlined in the following section.

Actions taken

- 15 A number of actions are being taken to address the issues raised in the grievance mentioned above:
 - There is a weekly meeting to look at caseloads of all social workers to ensure management oversight and fair distribution of work.
 - There is a rolling recruitment programme with a revised recruitment and retention strategy and a dedicated webpage. We will be showcasing Leeds at the National Community Care Live event in October with colleagues from Adults Services as an attractive option for relocation. This is an event held in London with a significant footfall of social workers.
 - An Early Help Team Manager and Early Help Practitioners are working from the Front Door to ensure timely access to services where there is not a need for social work involvement. They have also undertaken all visits to families who have children arriving from Ukraine and with host families and refer to social work if any safeguarding concerns.
 - We are recruiting sessional workers to take on work such as transporting children, attending appointments and family time, to ease pressure on social workers.
 - We have recruited 10 additional temporary social work assistants and 10 permanent Advanced Practitioners to support social workers.
 - We have a revised streamlined progression process produced in consultation with social workers and team managers which has received positive feedback.
 - We continue to have a high level of Quality Assurance (QA) Activity, with a new service manager for Capacity and Change working closely with the Principal Social Worker, bringing together learning from across Children's Social Work Services in Leeds and national learning. We have an audit schedule of dip sampling and audits that feed into a monthly QA meeting. This helps keep oversight of key emerging themes and allows for a robust workforce development and learning offer.
 - We have a blended and enhanced learning offer reflecting the current challenges and needs of the sector ensuring feedback from staff is incorporated into learning. This includes:

- Action Learning Sets with mentoring for all social workers in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).
- Additional mentoring groups for social workers in their Second year in employment.
- A range of master classes aimed at social workers in their ASYE around key practice areas such as neglect, domestic violence, child exploitation, sexual abuse, poverty and many more. We commission current academics and national credible leaders in the field to deliver these.
- Tailored training around analysis and decision making delivered as part of our core offer by Professor David Shemmings.
- All our social workers have access to Research in Practice training and resources as part of our access package.
- All our social workers have access to training and resources from Children Social Work Matters (regional support commissioned jointly with other regional local authorities) this ensures sharing of good practice across the region.
- We have an enhanced training offer for team managers, including themed practice sessions delivered by our Principal Social Worker, An Aspiring Team Managers programme, supervision training, a tailored training by Professor David Shemmings on decision making, shadowing and mentoring opportunities, as well as access to master classes and core training.
- We have specific additional training for our Advance Practitioners that supports their work in coaching and mentoring social workers to develop their practice.

16 Our social work and other salaries are in line with several of our regional colleagues at all levels. This is subject to regular benchmarking across all levels.

- We are benchmarking our wider benefits against other local authorities in the region to develop our offer and ensure that we remain competitive.
- Annual pay increases are negotiated nationally by the National Employers Association and National Trade Union Representatives and are then implemented by LCC. LCC is committed to the outcome of these national negotiations.
- We are considering possible additional incentives for social work posts given the current recruitment challenges and details are being finalised, which we will share with our Trade Union colleagues and staff when we have a proposed offer.
- A Task and Finish group is being established to bring managers and practitioners together to explore the wider benefits that social care colleagues would find helpful and that would support a positive work-life balance with a proposal to be developed.
- Staff have shared the negative impact on them of the Cost of Living crisis, this feedback has been taken on board and will feed into the work around pay and benefits. This is an impact that is being felt by staff right across the council and nationally.
- We are looking to expand the number of P cards (purchasing cards) that are open to cash withdrawal to ensure that practitioners have access to cash to support children and families where necessary and do not have to rely on claiming back expenses.

- The council has an excellent InSite - #TeamLeedsBeWell offer in place, informed by engagement with staff, staff network groups and trade union colleagues, including support session, access to counselling and a range of other support for particular challenges we all face.

Safeguarding and support

- 17 We are working to reduce caseloads as detailed earlier in this report, through our extensive Recruitment and Retention Plan.
- 18 It is recognised that higher caseloads can impact on wellbeing of social workers and on time to see children. Whilst recording is important social workers in Leeds are clear that seeing children and understanding their lived experience is always the main priority. We are working with colleagues around Mosaic, our record keeping system, to look at how to make efficiencies in recording time. With the help of practitioners we have identified a range of areas that can be improved including a group function where recordings can be added to a sibling group without having to repeat individually.
- 19 The following also ensure that children and families in Leeds are appropriately safeguarded and social workers are supported:
- All social workers receive monthly supervision.
 - Dip samples are undertaken of Section47 enquiries and visits. (A Section47 enquiry is the duty for Children's Social Care to carry out an investigation when they have 'reasonable cause' to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm).
 - Newly qualified social workers in their ASYE undertake Section47 enquiries with a more experienced social worker.
 - Children have clear multi-agency plans that are reviewed and the plan signed off by the team manager
 - All Section47 enquiries have management oversight by a team manager who makes a decision on next steps.
 - The recruitment of additional Advanced Practitioners means more experience in teams to support less experienced workers.
 - We have revised the Practice Standards Manual for all social workers and team managers to provide clarity on statutory responsibilities and safeguarding. This is a book of simple quick guides for social workers to be able to access when they have limited time to seek clarity.
 - All decisions at the Front Door have management oversight.
 - We have a weekly referral review meeting which includes colleagues from police and health looking at all referral of abuse and neglect that did not have a strategy discussion to ensure oversight and safe decision making.
- 20 Despite the challenges Leeds continues to have a robust response to safeguarding and supporting children and families. Social Workers in Leeds are doing a fantastic job in a very challenging environment and it is recognised that although the Leeds position is better than the national picture, it remains challenging and will likely be going forwards. Recognising pressures and challenges within the service, a recent [decision](#) approved the investment of £1.4m to build

service capacity, improve outcomes for children and reduce pressures on the children's social work service associated with increasing demand. In addition to enabling recruitment to 29 additional posts across the service through this investment, the report notes the intention to develop '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. In this way we are seeking not only to respond to current challenges, but to anticipate future pressures in the service and to equip it to meet these.

- 21 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people one of the most important responsibilities, if not the most important responsibility, of local authorities. It is for this reason that Children's Services are the most regulated area of the Council and subject to robust external scrutiny by Ofsted.
- 22 The most recent Ofsted inspection of Leeds Local Authority Children's Services, was carried out between 21st February and 4th March 2022, and published On 9th May 2022 (see Executive Board [report](#) of 22nd June 2022). Ofsted inspectors rated Leeds City Council 'outstanding' for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; 'good' for the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; and 'outstanding' for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers. The overall rating was therefore 'outstanding'. The nature of the inspection was extensive throughout the two weeks they were on site and involved a total of seven Inspectors, one Quality Assurance Manager and 308 hours spent on-site. It also included discussions with senior leaders; team managers and service delivery managers; practitioners; parents/carers/family members; foster carers; young people; education colleagues; and multi-agency partners too. All this being said, the Council is not complacent in its approach and will ensure that crucial aspects of support and action remain in place, now and moving forwards.
- 23 The inspection report stated *"As one of the largest cities in the UK, Leeds has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership reports that the impact of the pandemic has seen a rise in the numbers of families living in poverty, worsening health and wellbeing outcomes, and increased numbers of children in need of support. There has been a substantial increase in the number of children referred to children's social care, at a time of increased staff sickness and vacancy levels. This has driven up social worker caseloads and the complexity of children's needs and circumstances."* (Ofsted 2022)
- 24 The inspection provided reassurance that *"Children's needs and risks are identified promptly, and for most children there are timely actions that aim to support the reduction of risks to children. Management oversight of timeliness of response to referrals has been improved since the last focused visit, which identified this as an area for improvement. There is strong management oversight of referrals. Social workers are skilled and knowledgeable about what actions they need to take to ensure that they gather the right information to inform decision-making."* (Ofsted 2022)
- 25 *"When children need a response out of hours, the emergency duty team provides a prompt and effective response. This ensures that urgent needs are responded to so that children are protected in the evenings and weekends. Inspection of Leeds local authority children's services 21 February to 4 March 2022 3 5. When risks to children escalate, most children's needs are considered in multi-agency strategy meetings. Attendance of partner agencies has improved since the last focused visit and there is detailed information-sharing and appropriate decision-making in these meetings. Subsequent child protection enquiries are thorough, with a clear assessment of risk which then informs the next steps. For a small number of children, strategy meetings had not taken place, and although children had been seen by social workers, there was a delay in multi-agency information-sharing and progressing child protection enquiries. This*

inconsistent decision-making means that not all children benefit from prompt multi-agency consideration of their immediate safeguarding needs. (Ofsted 2022).

26 In addition to the ILACS (Inspecting local authority children’s services) inspection, the high standards in Leeds are further recognised as all our Children’s Homes in Leeds have been inspected with Ofsted ratings of Good or Outstanding as below:

| | | |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| Willows | January 2020 | Outstanding |
| St Cath’s | June 2021 | Good |
| Acorn Lodge | July 2021 | Outstanding |
| Lingfield | July 2021 | Good |
| Cherry Tree | August 2021 | Outstanding |
| Luttrall | November 2021 | Good |
| Easdale | March 2022 | Good |

27 The work of Leeds is recognised nationally with Leeds continuing to drive sector-led improvement. The Leeds Relational Practice Centre (LRPC) was set up to lead on sector led improvement work with the DfE and partner LA’s. Since 2016 the LRPC has:

- Contributed to local and national reform and learning that has helped Leeds to two ‘Outstanding’ ratings from Ofsted and improvements in the Partner local authorities supported by Leeds.
- Worked with over 90% of local authorities through improvement partnerships and learning programmes
- Led the Leeds element of the DfE’s £84M Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme, working with six local authorities over five years.
- Led the Leeds work as a ‘Partner in Practice’ on sector led improvement partnerships – working with 20 local authorities. Improved Ofsted ratings, culture and leadership, workforce development, recruitment, retention and morale.

28 The Executive Board Member for Children's and Adult Social Care sits on the Local Government Association National Board for Children and Young People. More recently the Chief Executive of the Council, Tom Riordan, has been selected to join the Children’s Social Care National Implementation Board to delivery recommendations of the Care Review. Both these appointments reflect the national recognition and the role Leeds plays in national improvements in the sector.

Conclusion

29 Whilst Leeds is not immune to the workforce issues that are being experienced across the sector, the Children and Families directorate are well-placed and determined to meet these challenges. A range of actions have already been taken and more are planned.

30 Leeds City Council recognises the important, valuable and complex role that social workers, colleagues and partners play in supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in the city to enjoy good outcomes. The progress that Children and Families has achieved since the failed inspection in 2010 is a result of the commitment and hard work of staff and ensuring that they have the tools and support that they need to deliver best practice. The authority remains committed to creating the conditions for success.

What impact will this proposal have?

31 The arrangements set out above recognise the challenges and pressures on the children's social work service nationally and locally; recognise the plans and actions taken to mitigate current impact and future pressures locally; and provide assurance in relation to outcomes for children and families.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

32 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.

33 The arrangements set out in this report are focussed on delivering the vision, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's (C&YP) 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.

34 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 consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

35 The Executive Member for Adults and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships has been briefed on the challenges, and recommendations and actions taken to address them, but recognises the potential challenge in recruiting to the roles to be established.

36 Unions were advised of the decision 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."

37 Managers and service delivery managers in the service were consulted on the detail of proposals to increase the workforce; and staff within the service were made aware of and were supportive of the proposals to increase capacity within the service.

38 We have encouraged staff to share their experiences by providing listening forums. We have communicated the actions above to all staff in an email sent out by the Assistant Director (AD) and Chief Officer on 13th June, encouraging social workers to share any concerns.

39 The Principal Social Worker meets with all social workers in their ASYE when they first start letting them know her role in supporting them and linking leaders to practice encouraging communication. The Principal Social Worker also spends time working from area offices speaking to social workers about their experiences and has monthly meetings with the AD to raise awareness to any issues raised by social workers and social care staff. The AD and Chief Officer for Social Work have held staff engagement sessions and are visiting area offices

What are the resource implications?

Human Resources

- 40 As a result of the challenges described above, caseloads have been higher than originally intended across the service placing workers under increased amounts of pressure. It is further recognised that 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.
- 41 It is anticipated that implementation of the decision taken in July 2022, together with full recruitment to the existing establishment will bring caseloads to acceptable levels.

Finance

- 42 As outlined in paragraph 20, recognising pressures and challenges within the service, a recent [decision](#) approved the investment of £1.4m to build service capacity, improve outcomes for children and reduce pressures on the children's social work service associated with increasing demand.

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

- 43 The risks to the authority of not delivering a strategy to reduce caseloads and meet significant increased demand for children's social work services are legal, reputational, and financial.
- 44 Implementation of the proposals outlined depends upon the successful recruitment to existing and 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.
- 45 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.
- 46 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.).

What are the legal implications?

- 47 The arrangements 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 objectives, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

- 48 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 arrangements 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?

49 The Outstanding rating achieved in the recent Ofsted inspection reflects the successful way in which children's services are delivered in Leeds.

50 Ongoing success will be measured through the reduction of impacts and concerns set out in relation to the children's social work service detailed above. This will be evidenced by:

- Reduction in caseloads.
- Relevant performance indicators.
- Compliance with statutory timeframes.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

51 Arrangements are in place and recruitment will continue as described above. The officer responsible for the assurances in this report is the Director of Children and Families, alongside staff from the Children's Social Work service in line with the Director's sub-delegation scheme.

Appendices

- None.

Background papers

- None.