

Rationale for the provision of additional resources in Children and Family Services to meet the requirements of the Ofsted Continuous Improvement Plan

Introduction

Currently we have at July 2017 2800 open cases across Children's Social Care this includes 533 children in care and 521 child protection cases. These numbers have increased significantly over the last 12 months, along with the number of care proceedings. This is in line with national trends and has placed significant pressure upon workloads.

The Ofsted inspection (SIF) in November / December 2016 identified key areas of improvement outlined in 17 recommendations. The development of a 'Plan on a Page' (Road to Excellence) and associated Continuous Improvement Plan outlines the LA response to drive services for vulnerable children and families in the County to be consistently good/ outstanding

One key Ofsted recommendation (3) is that caseloads in many areas are too high. Although plans were in place at the time of the inspection to address this in some areas, the impact in others had not resulted in the increased capacity required. Work has continued since December 2016 to address this but to date this has largely been by the deployment of agency staff. This is not a long term solution and is extremely expensive.

Data in this report demonstrates the pressure, if agency staff had not been deployed.

Caseloads

CIPFA in a recent report Children & Families – Good Value from Good Practice identified the importance of “maintaining sensible staffing workloads of 14-17 children to each worker” as a key element to achieving best outcomes and best use of resources. The only two Authorities rated by Ofsted as outstanding have social worker (SW) caseloads of between 7 – 10 children. Present caseloads in Leicestershire are higher than both of these standards.

It is our aspiration to move to the 14-17 standard identified by CIPFA with a further reduction for newly qualified Social Workers in their initial Assessed Year in Practice (ASYE) and Senior Practitioners(Snr Prac) having regard for their inexperience or their additional supervisory responsibilities. Mindful of the resourcing implications of achieving this we are currently proposing a less ambitious standard for all Social Workers (FTE) to have 18-20 children and ASYEs and Senior Practitioners to have reduced caseloads of 12-15 children. Caseloads are now monitored on a monthly basis by SMT which indicates we do achieve our standard in some teams but in others workers are supporting too many children. We are also maintaining sensible caseloads in some teams through the use of supernumerary agency staff employed leading up to and as an immediate response to the Ofsted Inspection. The proposed investments here in permanent staff will replace these and remove the associated financial pressures as detailed at the end of the report.

The situation will require ongoing monitoring and evaluation using the improved performance reporting which has been introduced recently to determine what further improvements will be required to achieve the 14-17 standard. It may however be possible to achieve the desired standard of 14-17 as improved managerial and supervisory practice is achieved as part of the Ofsted Improvement Plan.

This report identifies below the required investment on a team by team basis with the calculation used to determine this. In some teams additional managerial capacity is required in order to maintain the required supervisory balance of manager to worker which is that a manager should have between 8-10 direct reports. Other teams require additional posts to achieve statutory requirements.

First Response

Present workload

There are approximately 1000 new contacts per month.

On average 600 – 700 of contacts go to the referral stage.

Children requiring assessment in July = 577.

Without additional agency staff caseloads would stand at 26 / 27 cases per worker but have on occasions been higher .

Proposal

To increase capacity by 2.5 Team Managers and six Social Workers to provide the following:

1. Reduce caseloads to the target of 18-20 for SW and 12-15 for ASYE and Senior Practitioners.
2. Remove the drift identified by Ofsted and achieve immediate decision making on contacts and referrals.
3. Increase the overall number of assessments being completed and ensure these are within timescales.
4. Provide an enhanced integrated front door to Early Help and CSC.
5. Improved performance of Child Protection procedures from Strategy Meetings and Section 47 investigations to Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC).
6. Provide an improved and more resilient Out of Hours Service.
7. Timely throughput of cases to meet all required performance and quality standards.
8. All workers will get appropriate levels of supervision.

Child Protection Teams

Target caseload capacity is all Social Workers have 18-20 cases, Senior Practitioners and ASYE 12- 15 cases.

On a team by team basis the caseloads of all staff have been monitored monthly by SMT. Based on this the following increased capacity is required:

Locality 1

Team A – Average caseload 18. –within existing capacity

Team B –. Average caseload 21. - 14 cases over the current capacity.

Team C – Average caseloads 22. - 16 cases over current capacity.

Required at least 1 additional Social Worker Post

Locality 2

Team A – Average caseload 21. - 20 cases over current capacity.

Team B – Average caseload 18. - within existing capacity.

Required 1 additional Social Worker Post

Locality 3

Team A –Average caseload 22. - 22 cases over capacity.

Team B – Average caseload 21 - 22 cases over capacity

Team C – Average caseload 23 - 20 cases. over capacity

Required at least 2 additional Social Worker Posts

Overall requesting 4 additional Social Worker Posts

Strengthening Families (Children in Need)

Target caseload capacity is all Social Workers have 18-20 cases, Senior Practitioners and ASYE 12- 15 cases.

Locality 1

Average caseload 18.- within capacity.

Locality 2

Average caseload 18. - within existing capacity.

Locality 3

One supernumerary agency Team Manager.

Average of 27 cases - 70 overcapacity.

Overall requesting one Team Manager and four Social Workers

Children in Care**16 Plus Team**

We currently have 250 16 plus care leavers allocated to Personal Assistants. We have a further 148 that are with SW's that need to have a PA allocated in order to meet statutory requirements of the Leaving Care legislation.

Ofsted noted under capacity here and identified that work is needed to strengthen the quality and management oversight of Pathway Plans which are generally of a poor quality. In order to increase capacity to bring caseloads down to 18-20 children there is the requirement for the provision of five additional Personal Assistants and one Support Worker. This will enable us to meet existing statutory requirements, improve overall quality and achieve better outcomes for young people.

It should also be noted that the new Children and Social Work Act 2017 extends LA duties to Care Leavers to 25 years so this will increase the pressure on the service. It is hoped this can be managed within the extended service being proposed here although will depend upon the level of take up which at this time is unclear.

Requesting 5 Personal Assistants and 1 Support Worker

Adoption & Fostering**Adoption Service Manager:**

Currently we have a Service Manager covering both the Fostering and Adoption Services. There is an assistant manager for adoption however this post is not in the establishment and does not have permanent funding.

To strengthen the role of both Fostering and Adoption we propose to create a permanent Service Manager for each area. Without this role the Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption Service will continue to have 8 direct reports, as well as being the registered manager with statutory duties for the Leicestershire Fostering

Agency, Leicestershire Adoption Agency and Welland House Children's Home. They also have direct responsibility for a large placement budget and sufficiency/placement strategy.

The establishment of clearly defined service specific managerial roles between fostering and adoption will allow us to improve our performance in both areas.

The additional managerial capacity and focus within the in-house fostering service will be an essential component for achieving the rapid growth of the service over the next few years. This growth and the associated cost saving is the main component of the service's contribution to the MTFS.

Proposal is to create 1 Adoption Service Manager.

Social Workers

These social workers will be working directly in the Kinship Team to promote stable and safe permanence within families. They will be undertaking assessments and carry supervising social worker case load for kinship carers for whom the court has determined should remain foster carers for the local authority for specific children. Current demand and FTE is set out below:

- 15 connected assessments being externally commissioned this year at a cost of £2200 per assessment in order that we meet the court timescale for completion and 4 allocated to other services in an effort to support the Kinship Team.
- There is currently 1.6 FTE supervising social worker capacity within the Kinship Team. These 2 workers hold a case load of 55 cases.

Proposal is to create 2 additional Social Work posts

SGO Coordinator:

Ofsted identified that we are not meeting our statutory responsibilities in terms of providing support to carers for whom the court has made Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) or are subject to Residence Orders (RO). These orders are more cost effective as the fees we pay are at a lower level than fostering fees as well as providing a better long term solution for children. There are 325 children who fall in these categories to whom we deliver no service at present and it is an area we wish to develop as part of our Care Placement Strategy. The court has recently announced the intention to 'invite' the local authority to apply for a Care Order instead of a SGO/RO until such time as the support plan to the carer and children has been tested and deemed appropriate. We will struggle to meet these demands as we stand which could limit our options. These children will then remain foster children and the payments to their carers incur the full fostering fees and allowance cost and create financial pressures.

It is the intention to introduce this SGO/RO support worker role to offer a core offer of visitation post making of the order to:

- Ensure carers access the appropriate training
- Ensure that carers understand how to use the training to best meet children's needs.
- Establish local area SGO/RO carer support groups
- Ensure carers access the appropriate support within their communities
- Prevent escalation of need and break-down of placement (improved stability and outcomes for children placed with kinship carers).

Proposal is to create 1 SGO support role

Post Adoption Support Fund:

116 children will receive financial support for their care until their 18 birthdays. In addition to this, the local authority drew down £400k from the Adoption Support Funding during 2016/17. It is likely that this funding will not be available from 2020. In addition to this, 45-50 children are placed annually (based on 24-16 Scorecard information).

Overall, Ofsted found that our adoption support plans required improvement and that we were over reliant on external support to carers.

We are also not compliant with adoption regulations that require the local authority to provide;

- Counselling support to birth parents and family
- Independent advice to birth parents where the permanency plan is one of adoption.

The funding here will be used to provide an adoption support core offer to adopted families.

Proposal to provide a post adoption support fund of £50,000

Safeguarding Unit

Independent Reviewing Officers

There is a need to increase Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) capacity in order to meet our statutory requirements to chair child protection conferences and Looked After Children Reviews. The data to support this growth is as follows:

- The number of Children in Care and those subject to a Child Protection Plan has increased over the last 12 months. This is in line with the national picture.
- IRO Caseloads in March 2017 (combining LAC & CP) average is 85 per fte IRO. The recommended caseload number within the statutory guidance contained within the DfE IRO Handbook is 50-70. Ofsted have also

evidenced in their thematic inspections the importance of maintaining sensible caseloads to enable IROs to adequately fulfil their individual statutory responsibilities. In order to ensure a reasonable case load in line with guidance the proposal is to provide two additional fte IROs.

The proposal is to increase the number of IRO's by 2

Children's Rights

These staff provide independent advice, guidance and advocacy to children and young people in the child protection and LAC systems. There is a statutory requirement for the council to provide advocacy for all looked after children particularly those living away from home or extended family. Further investment is required due to:

- Increases in the number of Looked After Children and those subject to a Child Protection Plan have significantly increased the demands of the existing service.
- We currently only provide a limited advocacy offer only to those children over 10 years attending case conference. We need to extend this, as appropriate to all aged children.
- We are also required to increase Children's Right Support to Children in Care including those living outside of the County who to date have had a very limited level of support.

In order to provide this more comprehensive offer we need to increase the number of Children's Right Officers by 1 post.

Quality Assurance

The provision of off line management scrutiny by experienced practitioners in order to provide an objective evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of operational practice is an essential component of modern social care services. This was not operating within the service until leading up to the Ofsted Inspection and since October 2016 we have had 2 agency workers employed in this work. Their contribution has been significant in providing an accurate appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the service and in monitoring progress as developments are implemented. They are also working directly with staff to improve their understanding and capabilities. This is providing a much more accurate self-assessment of the service amongst staff than had previously existed when there was a largely over optimistic view.

This is an absolutely essential element of the service's Improvement Plan.

The Proposal is to create 2 Quality Assurance Officers.

Staff Development

This is being proposed in liaison with People Services. Legislation requires the Local Authority to establish the post/function of the Principal Social Worker (PSW). We currently have 0.5 funding in the base budget. The other 0.5 was previously funded by EIP (SDS) grant monies which is no longer available. The PSW role is crucial to provide a link between practice and the Director to ensure we have a quality social work practice.

The proposal is to provide 0.5 funding to make this a permanent, full-time post

The post will help drive and deliver consistent practice and place the local authority in a strong position to deliver and embed further the Signs of Safety Initiative which was so positively commented upon by Ofsted and will be a key element in enhancing practice standards.

Our proposal is to further support practice improvement by recruiting two Advanced Practitioners (APs), reporting to the PSW. The Council is out of line with most other LA's where such positions have been well established for some time and these will be key components of our drive to removing the inconsistent practice we have identified in areas of our work and which was also of concern to Ofsted.

The department is hopeful of receiving further government funding for the next phase of the Signs of Safety Innovation Initiative and these posts will be counted as match funding when EIP2 monies are made available.

The proposal is to create 2 Advanced Practitioner Posts

Leadership and Management

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires LA's to develop clear progression and accreditation routes for social work professionals. Whilst many LA's have well developed progression routes in place on which to build, LCC does not. Apart for ASYE level, where there is still much development required, we need to establish professional progression routes. This will be fundamental in helping address the consistency in practice and management oversight to make the LA to good/ outstanding. We are exploring with Learning & Development colleagues how best to provide this bid and our proposal is to ensure solid practice development, of which progression and accreditation is a part of a Head of Service post is established to lead this key area of work.

This post will also manage the PSW and the development of practice standards across all aspects of our work in C&F Services not only Social Care. This will bring together in a much more co-ordinated way aspects and responsibilities presently sitting in both C&F Services and People Services improving both efficiency and effectiveness.

Proposal: to recruit 1 Head of Service Post

Partnership Working

Inter-agency partnership working has been under developed in social care services. This has been compounded in our joint working with Health by the fact there has been little focus within the BCF and STP on children's services. Also the lack of a formal overarching inter-agency partnership group to establish the priority areas for children and family services and translate these into a plan and steer and monitor progress towards achievement has also been a weakness.

A Children and Families Partnership has now been established reporting into the Health and Wellbeing Board and work is underway to produce a C&F Plan. In order to support this development and increase partnership working in general particularly with Health Services there is a need to create a dedicated post. This would be based within the Health and Care Integration Unit as part of Cheryl Davenport's team. This development is being supported by health commissioners and providers. It has also been endorsed by the Integration Executive as positive development in addressing what they accept has been an under representation.

Proposal: to recruit 1 Partnership Manager post.

Legal Costs

These are largely associated with Family Court and include in-house services as well as the commissioning of services such legal counsel or specialist assessment. The base budget has remained relatively static during a time which has seen significant increases in the level of legal activity which is also getting increasingly complex in nature. This has resulted in the present budget, which is apportioned across Legal and C&F Services, being insufficient to meet demand.

Proposal: to increase the base budget to a level sufficient to meet present demand; funding for 2 solicitors and court fees.

Costs

The proposed action plan will require an investment of £2.5m. Growth of £0.5m was built into the 2017/18 budget, so the net investment required is £2m. The growth addresses the capacity issues identified within the report, it also allows investment to address significant legal cost pressures arising as a result of the increased number of care proceedings.

In 2017/18 the pressure on the overall children's social care budget continues with c8% per annum increases in numbers of children coming into care. This means that an overall overspend taking account of both placement costs and the part year cost of the additional resources for the Ofsted action plan is highly likely, not least that it was necessary to respond to concerns raised during the inspection by engaging additional agency staff.

It is worth noting that the Ofsted action plan identified a need for additional resources, but at the same time also stated performance issues need to be

addressed. Medium term financial sustainability will require both areas to be addressed simultaneously. At the same time good progress needs to be made with the £4m savings target in the budget.

As pointed out in the report experience from elsewhere shows there is significant financial risk from not investing.

Conclusion

Without this investment it will be extremely difficult and in some areas impossible to achieve the necessary service improvements outlined in the Ofsted Improvement Plan which was agreed by Cabinet and has been sent to Ofsted as required.

Whilst Ofsted do not directly return to check on the progress and timelines contained within the Improvement Plan they do monitor the service in differing ways. We have regular formal meetings with them where they question senior managers as to progress. They review our statutory performance returns particularly in relation to areas of concern highlighted within the Inspection Report. They will monitor our Serious Case Reviews or any Peer Reviews.

A new round of Ofsted inspections is commencing, some of which are thematic and these can be targeted at LAs where full inspections have highlighted issues. The next round is focussing on neglect and will pay particular attention to front door arrangements. This was a key area of weakness for us and could therefore increase the chances of Leicestershire being chosen.

We are also awaiting an Ofsted SEND Inspection which will cover aspects of the SIF Inspection with the expectation of progress in the areas where issues were identified.

Whilst another major inspection is unlikely to be imminent it will occur in the next few years. This SIF Inspection will be the main reference point and clear progress will be expected to have been achieved.

The financial costs of failing or achieving poor inspection rating are well recorded and significant.

Some of the investment proposed above will also lead to cost savings in the long term by providing more cost efficient service models or more effective interventions into families with better outcomes.

The Council has always aspired to provide the highest quality service to children and families in order to achieve the best possible outcomes particularly to those in greatest need. The SIF Inspection told us in some areas we are not operating in a manner which is conducive to achieving this and we need to do better. The main argument for this investment as part of an overall improvement plan is not Ofsted but that it will enable the Council to achieve its overall aspirations for C&F Services.