

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Wednesday 11 April 2018

Report of the Interim Deputy Director of Children's Services

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
None;

Staffing in Children's Services

Contact for further information:

Sally Allen, Tel: 01772 531754, Interim Deputy Director of Children's Services
sally.allen@lancashire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

Following the Ofsted inspection in September 2015, temporary posts were established in Children's Services to create the Placement with Family & Friend Team, ensure more robust safeguarding arrangements within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and to strengthen auditing activity. The posts undertake essential statutory responsibilities and support continued improvement in the quality of practice. To sustain this improvement and in line with our aspiration that practice is consistently good or outstanding, it is proposed to increase the permanent staff establishment by making the temporary posts permanent and by establishing additional posts to support Children's Services.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order No. 27 have been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet is asked to approve the staffing proposals relating Children's Services, as set out in the report.

This decision should be implemented immediately for the purposes of Standing Order 35 as any delay could adversely affect the execution of the County Council's responsibilities. The reason for this is to ensure that a permanent and enhanced staffing structure is in place as soon as possible.

Background and Advice

In response to the recommendations of the Ofsted inspection, in 2016/17 a number of temporary posts were established to ensure a concerted focus on areas of practice that needed addressing with urgency. In particular, that practice was

compliant with statutory requirements, securing permanence for children at the earliest opportunity and improving the quality and timeliness of assessment. The inspection also highlighted the need to strengthen our arrangements in respect of quality assurance, to ensure confidence in audit as an effective tool to drive improvement in the quality of front-line practice.

The temporary posts created in the Placement with Family & Friend Team, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and the Audit Team require mainstreaming to ensure that a permanent staffing structure is in place as soon as possible. This is aligned to priorities within the Ofsted Improvement Plan, is part of our approach to demand management and will ensure we continue to provide effective safeguarding arrangements for children. A stable and consistent workforce will also provide the foundations for continuous improvement in the quality of front-line practice.

The proposals are outlined in more detail below:

Placement with Family & Friend Team

The team (within the Fostering and Adoption Service) undertake assessments of family members as carers for children no longer able to reside with their birth parents where legal proceedings have been initiated via the court. This is a statutory responsibility and includes Special Guardianship Order and connected carer assessments. A change of focus within the court arena has resulted in significantly more assessments of multiple family members being directed for both Special Guardianship Order and connected carer assessments. The current temporary team consists of 1 Team Manager, 2 Practice Managers and 10 Social Workers. When this team was put in place it was anticipated that 80 full assessments would be completed a year. However, in the first year 512 viability assessments and 387 full assessments were completed. The pilot identified that the current temporary staffing resource is insufficient to manage the level of demand. The high turnover of agency staff has impacted significantly on the capacity and performance of this team. There are significant financial and reputational risks when court timescales cannot be adhered to and also delay in permanence being achieved for children, which in turn is an inspection risk.

The establishment of a permanent Placement with Family and Friend Team is proposed, consisting of 1 Team Manager, 2 Practice Managers, 12 FTE Social Workers, 2 Support Workers and 2 Business Support Officers. With a full cohort of staff, the team will complete the viability assessments, (over 500 a year) and the connected carer and SGO assessments where joint assessments are directed by the court, (approximately 400 a year). Where a Special Guardianship Order only assessment is required (approximately 100 a year) this will be completed by Children's Social Care. No additional staff resource is required within Children's Social Care.

The additional funding required to support this proposal is £782,000.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub undertakes a crucial statutory function and is a central component of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. Over the last 2 years significant work has been undertaken in re-designing the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. This includes the development of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub as a single point of contact for contacts/referrals where there are child welfare concerns, strengthening social work analysis and decision making and more robust managerial oversight of practice, ensuring appropriate and timely decisions are made to safeguard children. The co-location of partner agencies in three locality Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub teams has also improved information sharing and the quality of practice. An assessment team has also been established within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub which undertakes assessments which can be completed within 10 days. This has been effective in managing demand on Children's Social Care, completing 17% of all children & family assessments and delivering improved performance. The changes made in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub have required significant additional staff resource, with 23 additional agency/temporary posts. This is split between the 10 Day Assessment Team, (1 Practice Manager, 9 Social Workers and 2 Customer Care Officers) and the three Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub Locality Teams, (1 Team Manager, 2 Practice Managers, 5 Social Workers, 2 Customer Care Officers and 1 Business Support Officer).

An Ofsted Monitoring Visit in February 2018, provided further evidence of the positive impact of the changes made in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Inspectors, did however, highlight the high proportion of temporary/agency staff (63%) and sought assurance regarding the local authority's plans to establish the current model as a permanent arrangement. Ofsted will visit the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub again as part of our forthcoming re-inspection of Children's Services, so it is crucial that this issue is addressed.

The additional funding required to support this request is £891,000.

Audit Team

The Audit Team is responsible for the implementation of the Audit Framework across Children's Services. The initial priority following the Ofsted inspection in 2015, was to embed the framework within Children's Social Care. Subsequent to this the framework has been rolled out to the Special Educational Needs & Disability Service and Fostering & Adoption. Audit has played a crucial role in our improvement journey and has underpinned improvements in the quality of practice, developing the workforces understanding of what "good" looks like in relation to the Ofsted inspection judgements. The continuing audit of practice and embedding the learning from this will be essential in achieving our aspiration that social work practice is consistently good or outstanding.

There will be a significant focus on audit during our re-inspection by Ofsted. Additional capacity is required within the Audit Team to ensure the Audit Framework is fully embedded, particularly within the Special Educational Needs & Disability Service and Fostering & Adoption Services where there is insufficient audit capacity.

The Audit Team currently consists of 1 Team Manager (temporary), 1 FTE Senior Auditor, and 2 Auditors. However, one of these posts is a temporary secondment which is coming to an end, as the post holder is required to return to their substantive post. It is proposed to make the Audit Team Manager a permanent post and to establish four additional Auditor posts - (Special Educational Needs & Disability Service : 1 FTE Compliance Officer and 1 social work qualified Auditor, Fostering & Adoption: 1 Auditor (social work qualified) and 1 Auditor (social work qualified) to replace the temporary secondment.

This request requires £86,000 of additional funding to support 2 posts for the Special Educational Needs & Disability Service, however, this funding will be provided from the Special Educational Needs & Disability Service reform grant. It must be noted that after 2 years when this funding ends, this will be a pressure within the Special Educational Needs & Disability Service budget if these posts are made permanent.

In addition, £88,000 of additional recurrent funding is required to support the 2 additional permanent posts requested. One of these posts is to replace a secondment as the post holder is required to return to their substantive post.

Consultations

N/A

Risk management

The risk of not making the temporary posts permanent and/or not establishing the proposed additional posts is that the local authority will be unable to fulfil its statutory responsibilities. Within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub there would be insufficient resource to operate the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub locality model, which ensures a timely response to referrals and robust managerial oversight of practice. This will also impact on our ability to safely manage risk to children. There are financial and reputational risks within the court arena if we fail to adhere to court orders. Finally, there will be a significant impact on the quality of practice and additional inspection risks linked to this, given the impending re-inspection of Children's Services by Ofsted.

Financial

The proposals outlined in the report seek to maintain and enhance staffing arrangements established as part of the council's response to improving its children's services, in particularly safeguarding. A review of the services has shown the current model to be effective and therefore now needs to be regularised. The cost of confirming the changes to staffing outlined within this report require a budget of £1.761m per annum. It is important to note that it is unlikely that this total funding will be required in 2018/19 due to some delays in recruiting to all posts. The expectation is that that the funding required will be provided and contained within the Children's Services existing budget. As part of the 2018/19 budget, c£15m additional funding has been included within Children's Social Care for anticipated price and demand increases. These proposals are a part of the county councils demand management

strategies and therefore is anticipated to form part of the additional funding allocated within the budget. While there are early indications that demand is starting to stabilise, it must be noted however, that the timing between securing a stable workforce and the impact on service delivery gives rise to a risk that demand does not reduce sufficiently quickly thus incurring a financial pressure.

Demand and price levels will continue to be reviewed over coming months and forecasts revised based on current activity, with an updated position included as part of the Money Matters reports presented to Cabinet in September. If at this stage there is not the required evidence that the funding of these posts alongside demand can be contained within the Children's Services budget, then alternative funding will need to be found either from other budget areas across the council, or as a last resort, from reserves (therefore meaning a reduced balance available to support the county council's budget gap over coming years).

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		