

**Meeting:** Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

**Date:** 19 September 2016

**Title:** Principal Social Worker Briefing

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**Service:** Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

**Wards affected:** All

**1. Purpose of Report**

To introduce the Principal Social Worker Briefing 2016.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

The sub-committee is recommended to consider the briefing attached and make any comments and/or recommendations as appropriate.

**3. Details**

See attached briefing.

**4. Appendices**

Principal Social Worker Briefing 2016

# **Children, Young People and Learning Safeguarding & Placement Services**

## **Principal Social Worker Briefing 2016**

**Author: Social Work Management Team  
Review Date: 8th Sept 2016**



## **1. Introduction**

The Children's Principal Social Worker (PSW) role within Safeguarding and Placement Services in North Tyneside is well established and has been in place since April 2013. It is well embedded within the Field Social Work teams and the Leaving Care and Fostering & Adoption teams. In terms of the staffing structure, the PSW is situated within the Safeguarding service. (Service Manager).

## **2. Regional context**

As in previous years the regional Principal Social Worker (PSW) group is now well established and also includes the Adult PSW role. The group meets quarterly is well attended and chaired by Head of Service for Darlington. The group continues to measure its impact.

### **The key aims of the group**

- Provide a forum for exchanging knowledge, resources and information about social work developments.
- Share information, ideas and resources in order to raise the standards of professional practice.
- Support PSW in developing their leadership role.
- Promote social work practice in the region.
- Develop a work plan of priorities to promote outcomes from the network.
- Be a channel of communication between PSW, Head of Service, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Director of Childrens Services (DCS) group regarding social work matters.
- Be a channel of communication at national PSW events - to represent a collective voice for the North East.

## **3. North Tyneside Principal Social Worker**

In North Tyneside the PSW is also the Service Manager for safeguarding. This role offers the opportunity to observe frontline practice, maximises communication with Senior Management, identify workforce and practice issues and implements agreed change. North Tyneside Adult Services have a designated PSW which ensures we increase opportunities to learn and promote consistent quality for families.

The role continues to develop with a broad range of activities as set out below

- Regular attendance at team meetings.
- Observations of frontline social work.
- Monthly meeting with workforce development colleagues looking at the needs of the

workforce as a whole, developing the social work health check etc.

- Attendance and the strategic partnership meeting with the University; an excellent forum to discuss the future social worker, current training opportunities etc.
- Monthly meetings with Adult PSW, sharing information, collaborative working in respect to Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE).
- Attendance on Adult and Children case auditing groups.
- Completing themed audits.
- Responsible for user feedback.

### **3.1 Outputs from the role of PSW in North Tyneside**

- Training for Managers with respect to 'impact on the child' audits to ensure that frontline social workers and Managers increasingly see the service from the experience of the child.
- Training sessions for social workers to write care plans which focus on outcomes and not outputs.
- Training sessions for social workers to deliver standards of good practice in relation to assessment writing and analysis.
- Joint working with the participation team to enable the voice of the young person to be heard in planning meetings.
- An annual health check of the views of social workers supported by an annual action plan.
- The development of monthly learning forums to maximise networking with social work and early help colleagues ensuring knowledge is updated and the transformation of services is underpinned by a knowledgeable and skilled workforce.
- Implementation of an electronic approach to policies and procedures which ensures up to date knowledge is available to social workers ( tri-x)
- Practice Educator training sessions to social workers in the LAC team supporting good practice.
- To support changing conversations to help workers to support personal development and maximise choice, to maximise prevention, to ensure integration in the community and work with communities to develop improved family and community resilience and shared solutions.
- Working with commissioners to shape the social care residential and supported accommodation market.

- HECS is well versed in relation to the Children and Social Work Bill.
- Students have experience of work in Childrens and adults service environments.

### **3.2 Anticipated outcomes as a result of the role of PSW**

- New audits comment on the service from the Experience of the child
- Social workers are assured that the experience of the child is uppermost in review meetings through the input of the advocacy team
- Young people with Disability will be supported to have increased opportunities to make decisions and maximise their welfare as a result of training as Best interest assessors.

## **4. Children Social work Bill**

### Key themes

The objective of the Bill is to “enable children in care to stay with their former foster family after they turn 18, to deliver a world class adoption system and to support high quality training and development of Social Workers”. (HM Government, 2016)

#### 4.1 Looked After Children and Care Leavers:

Local Authorities to support children in care as they move into adult life, by acting as the corporate parent.

Local Authorities are required to publish a local offer to care leavers, setting out the services they are entitled to.

Local Authorities to extend the right to a personal adviser, who will make sure care leavers receive the support they need to make the transition into adulthood, to all who want one up to the age of 25.

#### 4.2 Adoption

Local Authorities and the courts to take into consideration a child’s need for stability up to the age of 18, when making decisions about their future.

Local Authorities and schools have a duty to promote educational achievement for adopted children and those in long term care of family members or guardians.

#### 4.3 Regulation of Social Workers

Introducing a new specialist regulator for Social Work, enabling a clear focus on standards and effective training and development.

Ensuring that lessons are learned from Serious Case Reviews/Child Safeguarding Cases.

Supporting Children's Services to pilot new, innovative approaches.

The next stage of the Bill is the Report stage in the House of Lords which will entail further line by line examination of the Bill and is scheduled to begin on 18 October 2016.

## **5. Annual Health check** (See appendix A, page 9 for more information)

Key themes

1. Workload and work life balance
2. Confidence levels in safeguarding children
3. Information sharing and communication
4. Engagement with staff on opportunities to have your say on changes to the way service are run.

## **6. Workforce issues**

The trends in North Tyneside continue to be similar to those reported at a National level.

### **6.2 Retention**

Experienced social workers continue to move to other Local Authorities to access a larger salary .The AYSE's leave North Tyneside after completing their assess year again to access a larger salary.

The response to a recent Freedom of information request identifies the trends within North Tyneside over the last 3 years.

- as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 98.31 FTE Social Workers
- as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 90.50 FTE Social Workers
- as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 89 FTE Social Workers

### **6.3 Recruitment issues general**

The Principal Social worker continues to report changes to the HECS Director. A National advert has recently gone to press to advertise for an Assistant Director for social care.

Innovative solutions are being considered in relation to possible strategies to encourage social workers to move into North Tyneside e.g. access to housing

We continue to look at options to maximise recruitment and retention for our social workers and continue to monitor the market opportunities provided by local authority neighbours North Tyneside is not unlike other Local Authorities who are struggling to recruit the desired calibre of staff required for what is a very challenging role.

## 6.4 Caseloads

Social work teams continue to provide feedback to the Senior Management team in relation to caseloads. These have now been realigned in order to deliver equitable caseloads across the teams. There is no definitive acceptable number of cases for a social worker to carry, though allocation judgements are supported by a workload weighting system which measures the number of cases and takes into account the complexity and gives a score. We are currently aiming to maintain an average caseload of 24 and continue to endeavour to reduce numbers. The average across teams as at 31.8.16 was 26 children per social worker.

## 6.5 Developments

Social workers have experienced two independent peer reviews

### 6.5.1 Feedback from the first peer review identified the following

#### Areas of strength identified linked to PSW role

- The Council is on an ambitious journey of improvement and is taking decisive action to demonstrate a strong commitment to improving outcomes for children.
- The Director is taking decisive action to identify areas of weakness and improve outcomes for children and young people.
- There is a strong commitment to partnership arrangements and these have set a clear strategic direction which needs to be translated into practice.
- The workforce is passionate about making a difference and improving children's lives and remains loyal and committed.
- Good connectivity between adults and children's services.
- Work to hear the child's voice and participation with children and young people is particularly strong with a range of innovative practice.
- Relationships and contact between children and social workers, social Workers know their children and speak about them with warmth and compassion.
- Support for newly qualified social workers is a strength and is valued by them.

#### Areas for improvement

- Performance and case auditing needs to drive accountability at every level so that children's outcomes are improved.
- There is a need for wider partnership commitment to early help.
- The workflow and structure at the front door should be reviewed to more effectively use resources.

- Ensure that there is sufficient strategic resource to lead the improvement programme and ensure the structure of the senior leadership team has parity with the sector.
- The vision for children and young people services needs to be better translated to front line teams across all organisations.
- Ensure that all social workers receive regular, high quality, reflective supervision that provides the right level of critical challenge and support.
- Develop career progression routes to motivate and retain Social Workers
- Continue to embed the approach for audit and quality assurance.

### **6.5.2 Second Peer review- “Ingson”**

The key evidence from the reviews is as follows:

- thresholds for commencement of work at the various levels and also the decisions for outcomes and next steps are generally sound in North Tyneside.
- Some very good practice was seen in the course of this review and this particularly applies to practice concerning single assessments and child protection enquiries. These are carried out and recorded very well on the whole.
- An improved and simplified care planning process would greatly assist practice. Work is required to ensure that there is evidence of focus and progress on the agreed plan.

## **7. New Initiatives**

Quality assurance support to ensure provide operational support to social work teams to put quality into practice.

### **7.2 Frontline**

Frontline is a graduate programme, it offers a unique opportunity for high achieving university leavers and career changers to join social work. The two-year programme offers a new route into a challenging career in children’s social work. It offers intensive practical and academic training tailored to your needs as one of a new generation of children’s social workers.

North Tyneside have committed to one unit:

- hosting 4 students for 12 months from September 2016. Students have now started and we have appointed internally to a social work consultant post who will lead our Frontline team.
- employing the same 4 students as an ASYE for 12 months from September 2016.



### **7.3 Firstline**

North Tyneside has also engaged in the Firstline project. The Firstline programme is distinct from Frontline – though the mission and aims of both programmes are aligned. The Firstline prototype is intended to provide:

“a leadership programme designed to develop good Social Work Managers into high performing, considered and influential leaders. Leaders, who will set high practice standards, focus on developing and improving social workers and contribute to the creation of high functioning, outcome focussed, practice systems”.

The programme is funded by the Department for Education’s innovations programme and was between September 2015 and January 2016. We had 3 SSW and 1 SWTM successfully complete the course. Two have already progressed to management position.

### **8. Conclusion**

It is recognised and accepted by all professionals that Children’s Social Work is complex and demanding. Like most Local Authorities, North Tyneside is finding the challenges of maintaining highly motivated staff teams difficult. It is however; encouraging that there is a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by social workers. As of November 2016 it is hoped that all posts including maternity covers will be filled. It is believed with the new training programmes new initiatives will give the service a much needed boost.

Kevin Buck  
Principal Social Worker

## Health check and staff survey feedback

You said...	We will...	We expect you...
<b>Workloads are unmanageable and you find it difficult to achieve a work life balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review our caseloads across teams to ensure that these are manageable and we have fairness and equitability in how we allocate cases.</li> <li>Commit to ensuring you achieve a work life balance – by discussing your flexi, lieu etc. and addressing this via supervision.</li> <li>Commit to raising issues around caseload and hours worked as part of our ongoing review of capacity within Senior Management Team meetings.</li> <li>Continue with our work linked to the early help pathway so we should see cases moving to partners much quicker.</li> <li>Purchase a more effective CCM system within one year that should hopefully address some of your concerns. However this means that there will be limited development over the next year with the current system.</li> <li>Implement the transition to the new Family intervention support team which should hopefully reduce your workloads.</li> <li>Look at options regarding a dedicated quiet area to address issues of the open plan office.</li> <li>Carryout a practical review of admin support across teams over the next few weeks.</li> <li>Review our documents to see what tweaks we can make to stop some of the duplication of work. We will do this by setting up a working group and link this to the work we will be doing linked to the new CCM system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To close off cases on the system where necessary in order for management to have an accurate picture of where we are with case allocation across teams.</li> <li>To commit to evidence your flexi and lieu so that we can start to address your work life balance in a more managed way.</li> <li>To be patient with us as we move towards a new CCM system.</li> </ul>
<b>Confidence in how the council manages safeguarding of children could be better</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to review and address high case loads.</li> <li>Continue to involve yourselves in shaping and influencing the senior management structure.</li> <li>Make a commitment to communicate more effectively with you.</li> <li>Work with teams to ensure we get the basics of management right which works for all of us.</li> <li>Work with our legal team to ensure consistency in decision making gets better.</li> <li>Provide better scrutiny and appropriate challenge where needed to ensure the safeguarding of children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To work with us to get the basics right.</li> <li>To provide scrutiny and appropriate challenge where required.</li> <li>To attend training and briefings when required.</li> </ul>

<b>Information sharing and communication was not effective</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge that we haven't been great at information sharing and communication but we will commit to do this better.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To challenge us through line management if you think we are getting this wrong and help us do it better.</li> </ul>
<b>There are not enough opportunities to have your say on the running of services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to you about system and organisational changes where appropriate.</li> <li>• Commit to having an open door policy for you to come direct to us or to go via your line manager.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To appreciate that sometimes the opportunity isn't there or isn't appropriate for you to have your say.</li> <li>• To feed your ideas/ information through to us and help us tackle some of our challenges via your line manager.</li> </ul>
<b>You want time and commitment to reflective supervision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge the peer review that said you receive good supervision, but that this doesn't necessarily impact on practice. The work we are doing linked to our QA framework will help address this.</li> <li>• Offer practice development sessions from the end of May</li> <li>• Look at options across teams for group supervision moving forward</li> <li>• Commit to protecting your time for good quality reflective supervision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To commit the time and resources to ensure effective supervision.</li> <li>• To embrace the QA framework.</li> </ul>