

## **Children and Young People's Services Select Committee**

**7 March 2019**

### **Demand and Capacity – Children's Social Care**

#### **Report by Executive Director CAFHE and Director of Children and Family Services**

### **Summary**

This paper follows a recommendation from CYPS Select Committee and sets out the plans that have been implemented following the decision of Cabinet to make an additional investment of £5.5million into Children's Social Care.

The additional investment is intended to support a number of recruitment and retention strategies to develop a strong and resilient workforce that will deliver good outcomes for children and families. Additional capacity will address the demand pressure being experienced in Children's Social Care and result in the reduction of caseloads which are currently too high.

### **The focus for scrutiny**

The Committee is asked to consider the initial impact of the £5.5 million investment and the recruitment and retention planning in place.

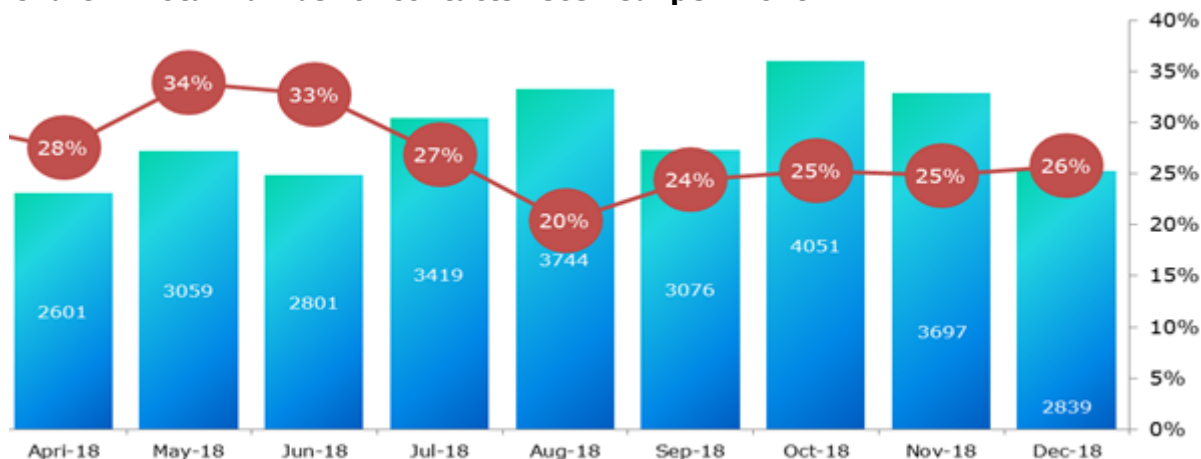
## **Proposal**

### **1. Background and Context**

- 1.1 In September and October 2018 Cabinet received a paper that set out concerns relating to the resilience of West Sussex Children's Social Care. It identified significant risks relating to increased demand in Children's Social Care and the impact of increased caseloads. An additional risk identified was the anticipated external scrutiny of an Ofsted inspection.
- 1.2 The increase in demand in Children's Social Care has been experienced on both a national and local level. Demand on the Children's Social Care Service in West Sussex has increased significantly over the past 2 years, Children in Need (CiN) has seen an increase in volume from 4652 to 5220 (+12%), Child Protection 417 to 775 (+86%) and Children Looked After (CLA) from 639 to 704 (+10). Alongside this increased pressure, the service has faced a recruitment and retention challenge in specific teams and localities. As a result of this caseloads in certain teams have been too high for too many social workers for too long. Information from staff surgeries and exit interviews indicated that social workers are concerned about the level of caseloads, associated risks and poor work life balance.

- 1.3 The local demand increase is shown by the number of contacts and referrals being considered by the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) on a monthly basis as set out in the charts below. Referrals into MASH in December 2018 were 9.76% higher than in Dec 2017.

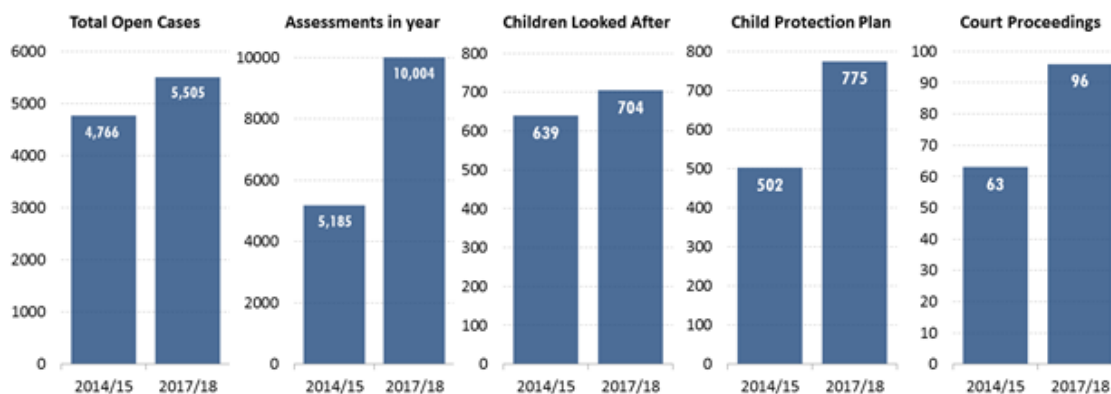
1.4 **Chart 1: Total number of contacts received per month**



\*The line shows the conversion from contact to referral

- 1.5 Chart 2 sets out the challenge facing West Sussex due to the increase in demand over the past 4 years. Not only are the numbers of children eligible for services increasing but, more importantly, their needs are far more complex than ever before.

1.6 **Chart 2: Demand in CSC activity 2014/18**



- 1.7 The increase in demand has had an impact on caseloads in Children's Social Care, and exit interviews and staff consultation identified that this has impacted significantly on social work retention and capacity of the social work cohort to ensure good outcomes for all of our children.
- 1.8 During 2017/18 work was undertaken to review the child's journey through the system to establish an evidence based confidence that the right children were being worked with at the right threshold for the right length of time. As a result of this work, the number of children subject to a child protection plan decreased and the number of children looked after stabilise. It is of note that the children looked after figure now sit well below those of statistical neighbours at 40.3 per 10,000 children compared to 51 per 10,000.

- 1.9 The work enabled the senior leadership team to identify with confidence that the current social work resource within Children's Social Care was not sufficient. It also became apparent that any external scrutiny (e.g. OFSTED) would expose the risk relating to the high caseloads within the service.
- 1.10 In October 2018 Cabinet agreed additional investment of £5.5million to support a number of recruitment and retention strategies to support the development of a robust and resilient workforce to ensure good outcomes for children and families.

## **2. Proposal**

- 2.1 The recruitment and retention strategies identified included the following areas;
- Recruitment of an additional 37fte social work practitioners and 6 practice managers to increase capacity and reduce caseloads.
  - Further development of the 'blended team model'. This is mix of administrators and child and family workers allocated to free up social workers to focus on the social work task.
  - A regrade of practice managers from G12 to Hay A to support retention and stabilisation of our front line management team.
  - An annual retention payment of £3k per year for 5 years to all social work staff in hard-to-recruit-to teams, including new appointments to ensure a stable workforce supporting relationship based practice.
- 2.2 Of the staff eligible for the retention payment, 88% have opted to take up the retention offer, signalling their intent to remain with WSCC for the next 12 months.
- 2.3 The following table sets out the current establishment of qualified social work practitioners in Children's Social Care (including the additional posts resulting from the recent investment). It details the numbers of permanent and locum staff and the number of full time equivalent vacancies.

**Table 1: Establishment in Children's Social Care**

	<b>Social Workers</b>	<b>Advanced Practitioners</b>	<b>Managers of Social Worker Teams</b>	<b>Total</b>
Newly created posts	37.00fte	4.00fte	7.00fte	48.00fte
Total number of posts (including newly created posts)	365.07	23.7fte	99.76fte	488.53fte
Posts vacant	92.84fte	7.08fte	17.52fte	117.44fte
Agency workers	40.40fte	0.00fte	11.00fte	51.40fte
Vacant posts not currently covered	52.44fte	7.08fte	6.52fte	66.04fte

The additional table sets out the pipeline information on incoming staff (interim and permanent):

**Table 2: Pipeline of new starters (permanent and locum)**

	<b>Social Workers</b>	<b>Advanced Practitioners</b>	<b>Managers of Social Worker Teams</b>	<b>Total</b>
Pipeline of agency workers (accepted offers) by 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2019	15.00fte	0.00fte	3.00fte	18.00fte
Pipeline of permanent appointments (accepted offers) by May 2019	19.60fte	0.00fte	9.60fte	29.20fte
Total appointments in pipeline	34.60fte	0.00fte	12.60fte	47.20fte
Remaining gap post-pipeline	17.84fte	7.08fte	0.00fte	24.92fte

2.4 The implementation of the recruitment and retention payment and the ongoing recruitment strategy, since November 2018 has significantly increased the level of interest in social worker roles. For example there were 44 applications in December and 36 applications in January 2019.

- 2.5 The level of voluntary turnover of qualified social workers was 16.99% at the end of January 2019, which represents a downward trend.
- 2.6 With the introduction of 37fte new posts, a project has also been implemented to recruit additional agency staff in the interim.
- 2.7 In addition to the recruitment and retention strategies linked to the £5.5m investment the following strategies have also been introduced in collaboration with HR and workforce;
- Return to social work
  - Trainee social worker scheme
  - NQSW/ASYE scheme and academy
  - Career progression scheme
  - Advanced practitioner role (i.e. a route for those who do not wish to be team managers)
  - Flexible working and part time hours
  - Casual bank scheme
  - Market supplement
  - Practice manager development programme

### **3. Resources**

- 3.1 With the additional social work resource and the further development of the 'blended teams' it is anticipated that caseloads across children's social care will be at an appropriate level and will support practice improvement and improved outcomes for children and families.
- 3.2 In order to ensure a timely resolution to the caseload pressures within Children's Social Care the interim approach will be to work with an agency to recruit 5 teams of 5 social workers. These social workers will be based in Assessment and Intervention, Family Support and Protection and Children Looked After Services. Recruitment to these posts has started and 15 appointments are confirmed with practitioners coming into post by 4 March 2019. It is anticipated that this will have a significant impact on caseloads within these services with a reduction to approximately 25 cases/children per social worker, and ensure that cases are no longer held by front line managers.
- 3.3 This activity will demonstrate effective management grip on the caseload issue and evidence effective reparative planning to prioritise a focus on quality of practice and relationship based social work.
- 3.4 In addition to the significant investment is the establishment of the voluntary Children and Families Improvement Board. The recent Corporate Review Challenge (November 2018) identified that Children's Services was fragile. The review recommended the establishment of a voluntary improvement board with an independent chair for Children's Services (to include a focus on the broader partnership). The purpose of the board will be;

- to drive sustainable improvement across Children's Services through advice, support and challenge to the Council, partners and the LSCB.
- to hold the Council and its key partner agencies to account for their responsibilities in keeping children and young people safe through implementation of the Improvement Plan.
- to secure sustainable improvements and performance in children's services and ensuring all Ofsted recommendations are owned and implemented by the Council and partners and the LSCB (including arrangements post Working Together 2018).

#### **4. Conclusion**

- 4.1 Whilst this paper recognises the future impact of both the £5.5m investment and resulting recruitment and retention strategy and the Children and Families Improvement Board it is important to realise that neither will have an overnight impact. These initiatives set out the ambition of West Sussex County Council to be a good local authority and lay the foundations of a robust and aspirational improvement journey.

### **Factors taken into account**

#### **5. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee**

- 5.1 This report sets out information relating to the increased demand in Children's Social Care, the £5.5m investment agreed by Cabinet and the subsequent recruitment and retention activity.

#### **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 The senior leadership team worked closely with officers in the Performance and Intelligence Service to inform a robust understanding of the increased demand and impact on threshold work within children's social care.

#### **7. Risk Management Implications**

- 7.1 There is a risk that an Ofsted visit to West Sussex in the immediate future could return an 'inadequate' judgement on the basis of the detrimental impact on delivering quality casework resulting from high caseloads and high staff turnover.

This risk will be mitigated through the recruitment of interim teams to the most impacted teams. We will also be in a position to evidence a clear plan for improvement through our retention and recruitment strategy.

#### **8. Other Options Considered**

- 8.1 The increased demand in statutory work requires additional social work capacity.

## **9. Equality Duty**

- 9.1 If we are unable to recruit to qualified social workers then there will be a continued impact on the vulnerable children and families. We would seek to mitigate this through recruitment of interim social workers. Whilst we could seek to increase the resource provided through the blended teams this would not address the statutory activity that must be undertaken by qualified social workers.

## **10. Social Value**

- 10.1 None

## **11. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 11.1 None

## **11. Human Rights Implications**

- 12.1 None

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