

Ref:

Name: Ian Johnson

Agenda Item No.6 (e)

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**12 June 2012**

**Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults**

**A New Systemic Approach to Social Work for Children and Families –  
(Young People)**

1. **Purpose of Report**

- a. To outline steps to reduce the number of children in care by:
  - i) commissioning child protection and children in care focused systemic training for social workers in Derbyshire;
  - ii) appointing additional staff on a temporary basis to backfill time to enable social workers to be released for the training;
  - iii) appointing a Principal Social Worker to support and sustain new ways of working.
- b. To seek Cabinet approval to create an earmarked reserve.

2. **Information and Analysis**

The number of looked after children in Derbyshire has increased from 503 in March 2007 to 701 in March 2012, a rise of 39%, and this trajectory is continuing. This has led to significant demands on the revenue budget and has placed considerable pressure on the system with increased caseloads for social work staff. A number of steps are being taken to reduce the number of children in care including the introduction of a manager controlling admissions to care and efforts to increase the numbers of children exiting care by being adopted.

This report proposes significant changes in the post-qualification training and practice of social workers in CAYA. The use of a systemic approach in social work is complementary to other approaches to preventative and early intervention services currently being developed within the council. Taken together, these initiatives will provide a comprehensive system of support to families whatever their presenting difficulties:

- **Integrated services** provided by children's services multi-agency teams were introduced in 2011 and aimed to intervene at an early stage with families to prevent their difficulties becoming exacerbated. Further rationalisation of existing family support services including home helps working in children's services is currently taking place. A family learning signature project is currently being piloted to provide staff in integrated services with the skills to assist families to find solutions to their difficulties.
- The **Troubled Families** initiative is currently being introduced and is aimed at improving outcomes for families with long established difficulties. This was reported to Cabinet on 15 May 2012. Intensive Family Services (previously known as the Family Intervention Project) are being re-shaped to support troubled families. Many 'troubled families' will also be required to work with children's social workers and the proposed systemic approach will help these families achieve the required changes.
- **Multi-systemic therapy** is currently being introduced with health service providers to support teenagers on the cusp of care and custody. This initiative is part funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and provides round the clock access to crisis support services delivered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The approach used within multi-systemic therapy shares many similarities with the approach now being proposed for children's services social workers.

The rise in numbers of children in care is largely attributable to an increasing number of neglect cases arising from parental substance misuse, domestic violence and parental mental ill-health. The OFSTED inspection report of safeguarding and looked after children's services in Derbyshire was published in May 2011 and rated services as 'good'. However, OFSTED highlighted the need for social workers to improve their analysis of children's needs through reflective practice and better planning of children's care.

The recent Munro review of child protection emphasises the need for social workers to develop high level skills to positively engage with families with multiple problems. Professor Munro recommends that Local Authorities embrace a reform agenda including the appointment of a principal social worker and the creation of professional development opportunities that will enable social workers and other partners to more effectively tackle families with multiple problems.

A detailed project plan is being developed to deliver significant reductions in looked after children through investment in a range of initiatives including the implementation of systemic therapy, focused on child

protection and children in care, which is now being actively promoted by the Department for Education.

It is proposed to commission a suitable training provider to facilitate intensive retraining of social work staff in systemic practice (a form of family therapy) with a particular emphasis on child protection and children in care. In authorities where this approach has been used the numbers of children in care have reduced significantly. There is also evidence of strong placement stability for those children who do need to be in care.

A pilot using this approach has already begun in Derbyshire with a small number of families. This is already proving to be very successful for the families concerned. Social workers who are engaged are enthused by the use of this approach and fully endorse its effectiveness.

It is proposed that an open tender process be undertaken to identify a high quality training provider who will be able to facilitate child protection and children in care focused systemic therapy training, to a maximum of 330 staff over a three year period, beginning in January 2013. Those trained would consist of:

Qualified social workers	205
Service Managers	36
Child protection managers	5
Family support centre managers	8
Staff turnover (maximum 10% p.a.)	76

The outcome of the tender process would be reported back to Cabinet in late September 2012.

The appointment of a principal social worker was recommended by professor Munro "Local authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice .....and is still actively involved in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the frontline to all levels of management". The appointment of such a principal social worker who will provide this professional leadership is now proposed as part of the introduction of the systemic approach.

### 3. Financial Considerations

£750,000 has been identified from CAYA underspend and permission is sought to create an earmarked reserve for this amount. This will cover the cost of training all social work staff and their managers in systemic practice and the appointment of a Principal Social Worker at grade 13 of the Derbyshire's pay and grading structure. The remainder of the money together with £600,000 given from Children's Workforce Development

Council (CWDC) will be used to cover temporary back fill social workers over the three year period. In the current economic climate there is no longer a national shortage of social workers and no problems recruiting these temporary social workers are anticipated.

4. Human Resources Considerations

Training will be provided to CAYA social workers employed by the Authority as well as service managers and other specialist social work staff. Training places for new staff have been factored into the plan. This course will be the key piece of training provided to social work staff and existing training courses will be reduced. Processes will be put in place to assist career development for members of staff, including exploring alternatives for any who will not benefit from the training. Briefings will also be put in place for other professionals involved with complex and challenging families to ensure appropriate awareness of this new approach.

5. Legal & Human Rights Considerations

The tendering process will be conducted in accordance with the Authority's financial regulations and the principles of EU procurement law and will be Compact compliant.

6. Equality of Opportunity Considerations

The principle of the equality of access to services will be applied in the service specification.

7. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime & disorder; health; environmental; property and transport considerations.

8. Background Papers

Available from the Deputy Strategic Director

9. Key Decision Yes

10. Strategic Director's Recommendations

That Cabinet notes the steps being taken to reduce the number of children in care and approve the creation of an earmarked reserve to:

- i) commission child protection and children in care focused systemic training for social workers in Derbyshire;
- ii) appoint additional staff on a temporary basis to backfill time to enable social workers to be released for the training;
- iii) appoint a Principal Social Worker to support new ways of working.

**Ian Thomas**  
**Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults**