

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

11 SEPTEMBER 2012

SUBJECT:	VALUING OUR SAFEGUARDING EMPLOYEES
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report is in response to the Notice of Motion "Valuing our Safeguarding Employees" approved by the Council on 16 July 2012.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 The Childrens Social Care service provides a front-line social work service to children in need and at risk in Wirral. By its nature, the service works with children who are exposed to varying levels of harm and stress. The Performance Report which is presented to members of the committee on a quarterly basis outlines the key performance areas and some of the demands on the service.

2.2 The service has had a number of inspections in the last two years. The outcomes of these inspections have been previously reported to members but in summary the service continues to deliver a good and in parts an outstanding service to children and young people.

2.3 In response to the Notice of Motion:

Point 1: "(the Council) is firmly committed to safeguarding vulnerable children in our care. Council notes that, at present, almost 700 children are looked after in Wirral, and according to the Wirral Children and Young People's Plan 2012-13, over 2,200 children have been allocated a social worker and around 360 have a child protection plan. Average caseloads for social workers in Wirral are between 25-30 children."

2.4 In the quarter from 1 April to 30 June 2012, a total of 909 children were referred to children's social care. Of these, 886 received an initial assessment and for those with complex needs or where there was a child protection assessment, a more in-depth core assessment was undertaken for 424 children. For children at risk of significant harm, a multi-agency initial child protection case conference was held for 82 children, and for 59 children, this was their first child protection plan.

2.5 On 15 August 2012, there were 3,093 children open to a social worker, of which 351 have a child protection plan and 691 were looked after, and the remaining 2,051 were

children in need of intervention to prevent them from impaired outcomes in terms of their health and overall wellbeing.

- 2.6 The above provides a snapshot of the complexity and level of demand faced by the service. The teams referred to include 1 central advice and duty team, 4 assessment teams, 8 care management teams, the pathway (leaving care) team, the children with disabilities team and the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance unit and will refer to qualified social workers.
- 2.7 Caseloads in Wirral will vary across teams, and in each team dependant on its role and function. The definition of a case is by an individual child, not family. It will also depend on the level of experience of the social worker. Newly qualified social workers will have a reduced and protected caseload for the first 3 months and for the remainder of their first year as 10% of their time is protected for learning and development. There are also part-time social workers who have an appropriate caseload. We have also put additional 6 agency social worker resources into Wallasey district to manage the level of demand in that area. The average caseload currently across 116 staff is 26 cases.
- 2.8 There are higher and lower numbers in individual teams; if a member of staff has a caseload that is higher than 30, that would be an area where managers would be expected to take action to put in place a plan to reduce that caseload in a timely and appropriate manner. If required, additional agency social workers have been agreed for a time-limited period to provide capacity to meet our statutory requirements while plans are implemented to reduce caseloads. There is no statutory guidance on the number of cases that a social worker should have. It is essential that there is effective management and supervision to ensure the allocation of work and the management of each case to support social workers in managing their caseload.
- 2.9 There is no “light-touch” work in the service. Following our changes to the Central Advice and Duty team and clear guidance on thresholds through the Integrated Working guide, all work that progresses to assessment and services are at the top level of the threshold and is appropriate for specialist social care intervention. This does mean, as evidenced in the organisational health check which was presented to members on 21 March 2012, that this creates demands of time and pressure for social workers to ensure that statutory requirements are met.

Point 2: (The Council) believes that one of the key ways to secure the best possible outcomes for these children is to affirm its commitment to maintaining a highly skilled, professional, well motivated and caring workforce and providing a working environment and terms and conditions in which they can consistently give their best;

- 2.10 As was evidenced in the Organisation Health Check which was presented to members on 21 March 2012, staff highly value the professional training and development that they receive through the council and also through the Local Safeguarding Childrens Board, and this area of spend has thus far been protected. Staff have laptops, 3G cards and digital pens to aid them with their work. Staff in South and West Wirral have moved from office accommodation in Moreton, which was not fit for purpose, to spacious and comfortable accommodation in Pensby. Staff receive praise on the quality of their work from their managers, colleagues in other services, the courts and children and young people directly. Health and safety and risk assessments for the

role are in place, and where staff face particular risks, individual risk assessments are undertaken. On rare occasions where a threat to the home address is possible, we work with the police to agree appropriate responses and have provided additional security measures at the worker's home address. The Employee Assistance Programme is well promoted and informal feedback from staff indicates this service to be responsive and of great benefit.

- 2.11 Wirral is still valued by those qualifying as social workers as having a reputation as a good place to work. In the recent round of interviews, over 100 people applied for social worker posts for six posts. The standard of applicants was very high and we have been able to appoint excellent future social workers. We have a staffing officer in the training section who delivers and co-ordinates training and support for all our newly-qualified staff. However, when we recruit social workers, they will be newly-qualified staff; a challenge for us is to retain our skilled and experienced staff to manage the complexity and risk of the work we have.

Point 3: In particular, (the council) welcomes the partnership work across Cheshire and Merseyside to deliver the 'Step up to Social Work' scheme to deliver Masters level social work training in Children's Social Care (Cabinet minute 198, 1st September 2011 refers);

- 2.12 Wirral took 8 people in the first cohort of the Step Up programme; 7 successfully completed the qualification and are now employed by Wirral as social workers. We have also been part of the second cohort and have again taken 8 people to support through their training. The quality of the people in the first cohort was excellent and we have benefited in recruiting high calibre social workers who will contribute to the ongoing development of the workforce.

Point 4: (The Council) notes the recent extension of short term market rate supplement payments to Children's Social Care Posts to improve recruitment and retention, agreed at Employment and Appointments Committee 23rd April 2012 (minute 90 refers);

Point 5 ...and notes that it was incorrect that market rate supplement payments have been delayed pending the outcome of the job evaluation exercise. Where applicable, market supplement rates have been paid to social workers who qualify for such a payment since June 2012. The job evaluation report is due towards the end of this year and will clarify the position with regard to salaries for our social work staff;

Point 6: ...and accepts the principle that social workers in Wirral should enjoy pay and conditions on a par with comparable authorities. However, this may have significant budgetary implications which should be clearly quantified and considered as part of the budget-making process;

- 2.13 A report presenting the particular challenges facing childrens social care in recruiting and retaining qualified social workers and managers was presented to Employment and Appointments Committee on 23 April 2012. It was agreed to implement a retention payment for those groups of staff, and a recruitment or market supplement for manager recruitment until job evaluation was completed.

- 2.14 The first advert including the market rate supplement has been published. Unfortunately this did not attract a wide range of high calibre external applicants for vacant Practice Manager and Principal Manager posts. 2 Practice Managers have been appointed internally. 3 Practice Manager vacancies, and 1 Principal Team Manager vacancy remain and continue to be covered by agency. A further advert will be issued in September.
- 2.15 The retention supplement has been positively received by staff and will assist us in retaining their skills and experience. Unfortunately, it did not dissuade three social workers who had job offers elsewhere from leaving us.
- 2.16 With regards to Job Evaluation, the pay-modeling phase of the process was time-tabled for June and July and has progressed according to timescales. Consultation regarding pay-line options commenced in August and will continue into early September. Work continues towards achieving an outcome during September, this is of course is subject to the ongoing consultation process. Part of the process is to examine comparator information and benchmark with comparator authorities. Once this phase is completed, feedback and consultation will take place to staff and a report on the budgetary implications of any changes will be presented to Cabinet as part of the budget process.

Point 7: notes that Wirral has recently joined the “Learn together Partnership” and is committed to exploring all avenues including the idea of a shared pool of peripatetic workers as a way of increasing capacity and resources;

- 2.17 Wirral has been a long-standing member of the Learn Together Partnership which previously had a largely education focus. The Step Up programme is an example of successful partnership working in this area and all local authorities in the partnership are keen to explore effective ways to work together. A shared pool may prove problematic because of the different terms and conditions and pay of each authority but the possibility of the region developing, managing and running its own social work agency is worth further exploration and will be taken to the Learn Together Partnership in the autumn for consideration.

Point 8: (The Council) notes that Wirral is working towards a significant reduction in the use of agency social workers and to that end has recently employed nine social workers on temporary contracts. This will begin the process of reducing agency staff costs;

- 2.18 These temporary social workers should all be in post by September when most of them, who newly-qualified, receive confirmation of their qualification. Following our recent interviews, we have a number of high calibre staff who were not appointed to permanent positions, and some of the temporary workers have now secured permanent jobs with us or elsewhere. We intend to offer a further 6 temporary contracts, bringing the total to 15. It is our intention that by January 1 2013, the only agency staff will be for manager posts and short-term sickness absence. This investment will bring stability to the workforce and commitment from staff who have a long-term aim of securing permanent employment with us, as they will be able to apply via internal adverts to permanent posts, thus shortening the current external recruitment process. It will also reduce our costs significantly.

Point 9: (the Council) notes that Exit interviews are undertaken for social work staff leaving the service of the Department and the Borough. Whilst any specific issues are addressed directly, the production of aggregate reports to capture trends/themes would be useful;

- 2.19 Exit interviews are undertaken but the collation of the themes and trends needs to be more systematic. The Local Government Association has issued “Standards for Employers of Social Workers” which provides a clear framework for monitoring social work supervision, training and development, workforce planning and caseloads. The branch has established an Employer Standards group with representation from the full range of social workers, teams and managers, with representation from Unison and HR. The first meeting of this group has agreed its terms of reference and outlined its priorities for its first year, including the monitoring of supervision and caseloads. It is part of the work plan for this group will receive themed reports produced on a quarterly basis analysing themes and trends in staff leaving the service. This will inform workforce planning for the service and steps to be taken to improve the retention of staff.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 A stable and experienced permanent workforce is critical in meeting the demands of safeguarding children in Wirral. Agency cover is used as and when appropriate to ensure statutory requirements are met but this can bring with it instability as there is a short notice period of a week. This can cause difficulties in re-allocating work and create additional pressures on existing staff as well as being disruptive for children and their families.
- 3.2 Failing to ensure that there are sufficient qualified social work staff, and managers to support and supervise their work, leads to a risk that cases will not be allocated or responded to in line with our statutory duties and places the authority at risk of a serious incident to a child, with the resultant negative publicity and increased oversight and monitoring by Ofsted and the Department for Education, who can ultimately place an improvement notice on the council.
- 3.3 However, we have a robust and tightly managed approach to the recruitment of staff and ensuring that all teams have a manager and the likelihood of this risk is low.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 There are no other options.

5.0 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Employer Standards group will be the vehicle for consultation with staff and union representatives.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 6.1 There are no implications.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 The cost of continuing to advertise posts for managers with the market supplement attached while still covering with agency managers is a major cost implication, as is the cost of agency cover for medium sickness absence. Long-term sickness will be covered by the temporary contracts.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no legal implications.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review is attached and can be found via the following link.

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no implications.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no implications.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 Members are asked to note the report.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 The report is in response to the Notice of Motion.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Tracey Coffey**
Acting Head of Branch
telephone: (0151) 666 4330
email: traceycoffey@wirral.gov.uk

REFERENCE MATERIAL

[Local Government Association: Standards for Employers of Social Workers](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Council	16 July 2012
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny - Sickness	29 January 2012
Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny – Organisational Health Check Presentation	21 March 2012

Employment and Appointments Committee

23 April 2012

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (from May 2012)

Section 1: Your details

EIA lead Officer: Vivian Stafford

Email address: vivianstafford@wirral.gov.uk

Head of Section: Tracey Coffey

Chief Officer: Julia Hassall

Department: CYPD

Date: 20/8/2012

Section 2: What Council proposal is being assessed?

Report to overview and scrutiny on valuing safeguarding employees.

Section 2b: Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

Yes

If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny 11 September 2012

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/children-young-people>

Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)

- Services**
- The workforce**
- Communities**
- Other** (please state eg: Partners, Private Sector, Voluntary & Community Sector)

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

- None** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4: Does the proposal have the potential to maintain or enhance the way the Council (please tick relevant boxes)

- Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advances equality of opportunity
- Fosters good relations between groups of people

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 5.

- No** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 5:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
All	Exit interviews will be collated to identify themes and trends that lead to staff leaving the authority which will assist in workforce planning. This will contribute to the effective recruitment and retention of staff and ensure that identified needs for support are met through revised training and support to managers. Staff may be concerned that negative feedback will affect any future reference and do not request or attend exit interviews with their immediate manager.	Staff are given the choice whether to participate in an interview with a different or more senior manager and also have the choice to complete and submit the exit interview form without an interview directly to HR. This will allow the monitoring across the 9 characteristics of reasons for social workers leaving the department.	Sue Blevins/ Tracey Coffey	January 2013	Briefing to managers regarding exit interviews. Officer time in HR to collate the figures, themes and trends and report to employer standards group.

Section 5a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?
Exit interview themes and trends to be reported to Employer Standards Group on quarterly basis for response and action as required.

Section 5b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

Section 6: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?
Sickness absence data

Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

Yes– (please delete as appropriate)

If 'yes' please continue to section 8.

If 'no' please state your reason(s) why:

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 8: How will consultation take place and by when?

Workforce monitoring and planning with social work staff to be undertaken by the Employer Standards Group. Staff representation from across the service with representation from the union and HR.

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting it's legal requirements. The EIA will be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 5. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for re-publishing.