

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Education & Children's Services
DATE	24 March 2016
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT	Reclaiming Social Work: Update
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS/16/008
CHECKLIST RECEIVED	Yes

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The report is an update on progress made on implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work programme.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee continues to support the implementation of Reclaiming Social Work with no substantive changes to the plans originally submitted. It is recommended that Committee be updated by bulletin reports on a regular basis on the implementation of Reclaiming Social work
- 2.2 It is recommended that Committee agree to extend the review of Residential Children's Services until the November Committee. This will allow full consideration of the Scottish Government's announcement in March 2016 on the SCQF Level 9 qualification for the residential child care sector as this will impact upon the proposed structure and grading of posts

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 Earmarked reserves of £2.93 million were approved in February 2015 at full Council. The reserve is to be drawn upon over the next four years.
- 3.2 The Reclaiming Social Work model is intended to deliver improved outcomes for children and their families. This includes a reduction in the number of children placed in high cost out of authority residential placements; increased staff retention and a reduction in staff absences.
- 3.3 The reduction of residential places along with the development of a Public Social Partnership will deliver savings to enable the Reclaiming Social Work model to be delivered from within the budget at the end of the five year implementation programme.
- 3.4 Costs of changes to buildings and other related costs such as training and

workforce development are being considered in collaboration with the relevant Council services.

**4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

None

**5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

5.1 In January 2013 Aberdeen City Council Social Care and Wellbeing Committee gave agreement for scoping work on the Reclaiming Social Work model. The model proposed was a whole system redesign that required significant investment throughout the development and implementation. It was anticipated that the process would take approximately 3 years from start to finish. Subsequently, committee agreed to:

- Aberdeen City Council's, Children's Social Work Services, implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work model
- Establishing a Programme Board as the operational governance forum to manage the redesign of the service
- Establishing an operational reference group
- Presentation of a detailed implementation plan and progress report to a future committee meeting

5.2 A proposed structure was approved by the Education and Children's Service Committee in January 2015. The proposed use of £2.93 million earmarked reserves to support the implementation of Reclaiming Social Work was subsequently approved at full Council in February 2015.

5.3 Implementation of the programme commenced on 1 June 2015. Governance is provided by the Programme Board chaired by the Director of Education and Children's Services. This Board meets on a six weekly basis and comprises of representatives from the Children's Social Work Management Team, Human Resources and Finance as well as appropriate partners/stakeholders such as Third Sector, Academic institutions (RGU), Education, SCRA, NHS and the Trade Unions. The Children's Social Work Services Management Team acts as the Project Team.

**Update on Implementation**

5.4 Over the course of 2015 Service Managers have continued to liaise with authorities who have already implemented the Reclaiming Social Work model. These discussions have assisted our planning and resulted in some minor refinement of the proposed structure. This will ensure our structure is fully convergent with the legislative and policy context in which social work operates in Aberdeen.

5.5 The changes to the structure will ensure clear and coherent lines of management accountability which are critical to safeguard the decision making in relation to the protection of children. It will also allow the Service to

- More effectively deliver on the new and additional duties imposed by the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

- Manage the anticipated growth in demand for Children's Social Work services as Aberdeen City's 0-18 years old population grows over the coming years.
- Retain a service specific focus for Children with Disabilities
- Ensure a focus on children who are permanently in Local Authority Care to deliver improved outcomes for them
- Ensure a focus on the planning and support for care leavers.

The decision to retain this element of specialism reflected learning from other authorities as well as the growing and additional legislative responsibilities. It also identified the need to retain an increased qualified social worker profile within some units reflecting the added statutory and report writing demands of some units.

- 5.6 To ensure we had staff with the right skills mix in the right settings, all staff have gone through a job matching process. This process is now complete. It generated an understandable level of anxiousness which required active and sensitive management. During the matching process the recruitment of new permanent staff was not possible to ensure existing staff were not displaced. This placed an added pressure on teams/services which has been managed through the recruitment of temporary staff and the use of occasional agency staff. These measures have ensured the safety of the service has not been compromised.
- 5.7 With the matching process complete we are now embarking on targeted recruitment for vacant posts. In particular we have a need to recruit Consultant Social Workers to head up each Unit. These are experienced social workers with a proven ability to assess and manage risk. This is a challenging and demanding role but one which offers much job satisfaction. Our ability to recruit to these posts will determine the pace at which we roll out the new service model. It will also be important that we actively support existing staff, not quite at this level to grow into these posts.
- 5.8 An analysis of a series of caseload audits undertaken by Service Managers continues to evidence the proposed structure has the capacity to manage existing work demands. A detailed appreciation of current work demands has been identified as critical by other authorities during implementation. These audits provide a rich vein of information to enable the identification of and planning for emerging casework pressures.
- 5.9 The Systems work stream has reviewed all children's social work processes and our client data base system, Carefirst, is being adapted to improve efficiency and reduce the reliance on paper. A comprehensive reference tool has also been developed to provide staff with accessible guidance on policy's and processes in the new structure. This has been tested by staff and feedback has been extremely positive in terms of ease of use and relevancy.
- 5.10 The HR and finance work stream has now split into two separate work streams. The criticality of ensuring budgets are accurately built from the bottom up will allow managers to actively manage costs and more accurately plan for and appreciate budgetary pressures as they emerge.

- 5.11 Regular engagement sessions continue to be held with staff to update them on implementation plans. Responses to questions from staff, in conjunction with HR colleagues have been incorporated into the FAQ documentation on the Zone for all staff to access.
- 5.12 Colleagues in the Councils Communications Team are now actively supporting the Service to explore how we can raise the profile of Children's Social Work both locally and further afield. This allows us to share information with partners and stakeholders as well as strategically thinking about how we attract high calibre of staff to Aberdeen to deliver the Reclaiming Social Work model. Separately we have held further stakeholder briefings to share with them the model and implementation plans. Further events are planned for 2016.
- 5.13 The Operational Reference Group continues to meet on a regular basis ensuring engagement with staff at all levels. This forum provides an opportunity to take account of how staff are feeling and listen to suggestions/feedback they have. It meets monthly and any issues that arise are taken to the Project Team meeting for consideration and response.
- 5.14 In preparation for moving to the new structure, a further 50 staff completed an accredited 18 day practitioners' systemic practice course during 2015 this includes workers from the children's homes. A tender for the third year of this training is now complete and an award letter has been issued. During our third year we will provide staff, including some residential staff who don't need the in-depth systemic training that Unit social workers require an opportunity to develop an appreciation of the fundamentals of systemic practice.
- 5.15 An announcement was made by Scottish Government on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2016 followed by a letter in March 2016 requiring all residential child care workers in Scotland to be qualified to SCQF level 9 (degree level). The letter provides clear timescales with training programmes commencing in October 2017 with all staff working towards a qualification by October 2019. In the light of Scottish Government requirements we will now need to reconsider the proposed staffing structure for residential care. We will therefore undertake urgent work to assess the financial implications of the requirements including the cost of training both financial and in relation to time away from work, and the associated impact on grades and salaries.
- 5.16 An evaluation of how the Reclaiming Social Work model is being implemented by Aberdeen City Council is being undertaken by Blake Stevenson. Their report reflecting on Year 2 of the implementation programme is due to be produced in March 2016. This will be drawn on questionnaires of staff at all levels as well as some service users. As with the first years report recommendations will be taken to the Programme Board for discussion and any learning incorporated into the planning for Year 3.

## 5.17 **Next Steps**

The first two Units will go live at the end of February 2016. A further six Units will be rolled out between March and May. Having completed this we will reflect on the impact of these Units and learning from their implementation before looking to roll out further Units after the summer. The speed of implementation will depend on our ability to appoint new staff to posts but at the same time ensuring that the safety of the service is not compromised.

5.18

Staff appointed to these Units are excited about this opportunity and are confident this model will contribute to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. The development of a revised quality assurance framework will support Service Managers to evidence improved outcomes but also identify where practice needs to develop to better support children and young people.

5.19

As noted in Section 3 the development of a Public Social Partnership along with a managed reduction in the numbers of children placed in out of authority placements will allow for the Reclaiming Social Work Model, at the end of the five year implementation programme, to be delivered from within budget. A separate report on the development of the Public Social Partnership is before Committee today.

5.20

An audit of all children placed in high cost out of authority residential placements was carried out at the end of 2015 by Service Managers in both Social Work and Education. The learning from these will allow us to consider how to support some of these young people return to Aberdeen on a planned basis but also consider how existing services need to develop to better support young people with similar needs remain within our own resources.

5.21

The changes to practice and service delivery impacts on the residential child care service with the review having a focus on

- Improving children and young people's experiences of being looked after in the children's homes and ensuring congruence within the continuum of care. This is of particular relevance given the additional corporate parenting responsibilities to care experienced young people who request an assessment of their continuing care needs
- To review the current staffing structure and support continued professional development taking account 'Higher Aspirations, Brighter Futures', the overview report of the National Residential Child Care Initiative (NRCCI) that recommends all residential child care staff gain a degree level qualification starting in 2017 to be fully implemented by 2026
- To review the use of resources to consider the capacity of the residential estate and ensure they are fit for purpose

5.22

Working to retain children and young people in the city, connected to their family and community avoiding being placed out of authority is a priority in developing the residential service

## **6. IMPACT**

- 6.1 Children's social work services work with those families who are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the city. The vast majority of these children and families are required to work with us on a compulsory basis. Relevant parts of the SOA that the reclaiming Social Work programme impact on are:
- Reduced inequalities in healthy life expectancy and improved physical and mental health through increased physical activity
  - Every child and young person in Aberdeen enjoys being young and at the same time feels safe, nurtured, healthy, active, included, respected and responsible
  - People feel safe throughout Aberdeen's communities
  - Effective lifelong learning through vocational and academic training from secondary school
  - Priority families
- 6.2 Implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work model will significantly contribute to Children's Social Works continuing efforts to improve the services delivered to and the outcomes of the most vulnerable children and young people in Aberdeen.

## **7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK**

- 7.1 A risk register has been maintained by the programme board and is monitored 6 weekly. The risks have changed over time and now that the programme has been implemented, one of the two major risks of staff motivation has reduced. The other risks such as not being able to recruit enough staff for new posts is being managed by scoping training for internal staff to be able to access new opportunities and planning external events that will share information on opportunities within the council externally.

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

*Social Care and Wellbeing Committee Report September 2013.*  
*Education & Children's Services Committee Report January 2015.*  
*Council Report February 2015.*

## **9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS**

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