

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education & Children's Services
DATE	25 January 2018
REPORT TITLE	Update on the Implementation of Reclaiming Social Work
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/18/011
DIRECTOR (Interim)	Bernadette Oxley/Helen Shanks
REPORT AUTHOR	Graeme Simpson

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:-

At the 1 June 2017, meeting of the Education & Children's Services Committee, the Service was asked to bring a report to committee on the update of Implementation of Reclaiming Social Work.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee –

- (a) Note the progress made in implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work model; and
- (b) Note the identified changes to the initial Reclaiming Social Work model as detailed at section 3.12 and 3.13 of the report to enable the Service to deliver full implementation of the model.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In January 2015 the Council agreed to the implementation of the Reclaiming Social Work (RSW) model for Children's Social Work. This model moved away from the traditional structure where social workers were allocated a number of cases (usually between 15-20+) which they worked, more often than not, on their own. Under this model social workers were responsible for assessing risk which ultimately contributed to decisions around whether it was safe for children to remain at home or not.
- 3.2. Experience of the traditional structure would suggest that staff at times felt isolated and burdened by a fear of getting it wrong. As a consequence practice was more risk adverse, contributing to increasing numbers of children in local authority care. Additionally if a worker left or was on leave, while other members of the team would oversee their cases and respond to crises, cases would not be worked. This resulted in drift in the plans for children being advanced.
- 3.3. While the Service structure is an important consideration the RSW model requires equal consideration to be given to a number of other core principles including:

- Staff/Skills – Supporting staff to enhance their knowledge and application of systemic practice while providing skilled supervision which both supports and challenges staff
 - Shared Values - believing in direct work to support children to remain in their families where it is safe to do so.
 - Strategy – A whole system approach with a focus on reducing LAC numbers but investing in development of the workforce.
 - Systems - reduce bureaucracy to enable increased staff time to be spent in direct work with children and families.
 - Style – Being risk informed not risk averse, being a learning not blaming service
- 3.4. To support the implementation of the model it was important that staff and service users clearly understood what the purpose of the service was. Simply put our mission is:

“To protect children from significant harm and where possible to support their family to care for them. For those children who cannot be kept safe within their family to provide them high quality care.”

- 3.5. To deliver this we will:
- Provide children and families with meaningful support, building on their strengths helping them to care for their children.
 - Treat people with dignity, respect and empathy at all times.
 - Work to reducing inequalities for children and their families who experience, often multi-layers of disadvantage.
 - When it is not safe for children to be cared for by their families we will work swiftly and effectively to protect them whilst being open and transparent with families with their collaboration wherever possible.
 - Support the continuous development of a credible, knowledgeable and professional workforce
 - Deliver on our statutory responsibilities keeping our interventions with families to a minimum.

These aims are directly aligned to the objectives of the Target Operating Model.

- 3.6. The implementation of RSW saw cases being allocated to a Unit. (A unit consists of 4.5 staff – 1 x Consultant Social Worker; 0.5 x Clinical Practitioner; 1 x Social Worker; 1 x Children’s Practitioner and 1 x Unit Coordinator.) The Consultant Social worker has responsibility for managing the work, delegating tasks to other members of the Unit according to their skills and experience. As a result all members of the Unit contribute to the assessment of risk.
- 3.7. Feedback from staff operating within a Unit model mirrors that of other Local Authorities who have implemented RSW whereby staff feel supported and better able to manage situations of risk and support families to affect change without the need for the child to be accommodated. This acknowledges that there will still be a need for children to be accommodated in situations where unacceptable levels of risk exist.
- 3.8. The RSW model was not solely about the redesign of the social work fieldwork teams. It was a whole service redesign with the underlying principles being adopted across all parts of the service. Committee has already been updated on the redesign of the Residential Service and their move to incorporate a philosophy of care strongly aligned to systemic practice. In addition the wrap around services

which deliver both Early Help and Intensive Support have been redesigned to take account of the new commissioned arrangements.

Update on the Implementation of the RSW Model

- 3.9. Since the implementation of RSW the recruitment of Consultant Social Workers has proved far more challenging than was anticipated. Despite considerable effort to recruit at both a local and national level our ability to attract experienced social workers to Aberdeen has proved limited. While we have been able to support a small number of our existing social workers grow into the Consultant Social Worker role the numbers able to do so has still meant that we are significantly short of the required number of Consultant Social Workers to fully implement the model.
- 3.10. As a consequence of the recruitment challenges structurally it has been necessary to operate with both new Units and traditional teams. While both Units and Teams have tried to bring a systemic focus to their intervention operating two different models has brought challenges for both children and their families as well as staff.
- Children and their families held by teams have experienced a higher turnover of social workers than we would want. In part this been due to our need to engage agency social workers to cover critical vacancies in the service. Some agency staff have stayed and bought into the work we are doing others have left after a short period.
 - Agency staff have not had the same opportunity to access systemic training and therefore have not been as able to adapt to the systemic approach we are seeking to deliver. They have also been clear that they are here on a temporary basis.
 - Social Workers yet to go to a Unit have expressed feelings of “being left behind” impacting on morale.
- 3.11. In recognition of the above factors along with the ongoing recruitment challenges the current structure of having Units and Teams within the same area of service delivery is considered unsustainable.
- 3.12. The service is acutely mindful of the financial pressures facing the Council. We recognise that the initial RSW model did incur added staff cost pressures. We also want to reduce our reliance on agency staff and bring greater stability to the workforce. To achieve this we would propose to reduce the number of Units from 26 to 18. (We potentially have 18 consultant social workers to lead each of the Units.)
- 3.13. To accommodate the workload of a reduced number of Units there will need to be an increase of social work capacity in most of the remaining Units, as detailed in the table below. (For three Units the existing configuration is assessed as being appropriate to the workload.)

Current Unit model	Proposed Unit model
1 x Consultant Social Worker	1 x Consultant Social Worker
0.5 x Clinical Practitioner	0.5 x Clinical Practitioner
1 x Social Worker	2.5 x Social Workers
1 x Children’s Practitioner	1 x Children’s Practitioner
1 x Unit Coordinator	1 x Unit Coordinator
Total Staff 4.5	Total Staff 6

- 3.14. The challenges which have contributed to the above proposal are not unique to Aberdeen. Most other authorities that have adopted the RSW model have already moved to increase the number of qualified social workers in each unit. Observations

would suggest that such has not adversely detracted detracting from the core principles of the model but has required some adjustment to the role to the Consultant Social Worker. Critical however is the need to retain a focus on evidence based systemic practice. This proposed change would allow for a consolidation of the delivery of front line statutory social work services, ensuring that we have sufficient qualified staff to deliver high quality targeted intervention where there is a statutory basis to do so.

- 3.15. For the past 3 years, the service has carried out twice yearly Case File Audits. This has enabled the Service to accurately determine the number of open cases as well as the complexity of the workload. These audits have enabled a growing understanding of the workload of each team/unit as well as the whole service. It has assisted in identifying where potential pressure points exist. While there will always be limitations to the data, the growing richness of it, is allowing for more informed Service planning as to how Aberdeen City Council is choosing to implement RSW to fit its own needs.
- 3.16. The case file audit carried out in November 2017 evidenced that Children's Social Work were working with approximately 1760 children/1220 families. The "weight" of this work is determined by the complexity of the case as well as other key factors such as travel implications and the volume of additional pieces of work associated with each case. Work has been undertaken which has verified that the proposed reduction in the number of Units, with an increased capacity, can absorb the Service workload.
- 3.17. These changes will enable the service to fully implement the structure in the coming months. As noted the service potentially has the required number of Consultant Social Workers although we will need to recruit a number of additional social workers. This change will ensure a far greater level of consistency of service delivery for children and families and will ensure staff feel supported to deliver the practice standards that we as a service require.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. Full implementation of the RSW model as detailed above will reduce some existing cost pressures particularly that of engaging agency social work staff to cover critical posts. In addition reducing the number of units will significantly bring down the operating costs of the RSW model.
- 4.2. Delivering a stable and consistent operating model will also better allow the service to focus on a number of its other strategic priorities including reducing the number of children who are accommodated including those in high cost out of authority residential placements.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

- 6.1. Financial – The proposed changes will be delivered at no additional cost to the Council indeed they will realise some savings. The changes will also assist in reducing the number of agency staff. Level of risk - low.

- 6.2. Employee – Extensive consultation has been undertaken with staff and unions to explain the context and rationale for proposed changes. Feedback acknowledged the need for and support of the proposed changes while also appreciating this was a further change. There was strong support for retention of a structural model that supported systemic practice. There is growing evidence that such is being positively received by children and families while also delivering improved outcomes. Evidence of caseload management activity highlights that the work is effectively being managed and our staffing resources are being deployed effectively. Level of risk medium.
- 6.3. Customer / citizen – Social work intervention is most effective when staff are working in a safe and stable structure utilising a clear theoretical practice base within manageable caseloads. Feedback from service users has to date been positive and encouraging. The Service will ensure that in delivering full implementation of the RSW model that every effort is made to minimise the impact on service users. As noted earlier the service has engaged an independent evaluation to determine the impact of Reclaiming Social Work. Level of risk low.
- 6.4. Environmental – There are not environmental risks associated with this report.
- 6.5. Technological – The service is continuing to explore ways in which technology can assist in freeing social workers time to allow for direct work with children and families. Level of risk low.
- 6.6. Legal – There are no legal risks associated with this report.
- 6.7. Reputational – Aberdeen City Council is the first authority in Scotland to implement the RSW model. Considerable interest has been shown in the model by the Scottish Government and other local authorities. In addition service users and local stakeholders are also interested in the impact this model has to service delivery. Success of the model will enhance the City's reputation. Level of risk low.

7. IMPACT SECTION

1.1. Economy

- 1.1.1. Effective management of the work across Children's Social Work is critical to ensuring that resources are being deployed to greatest effect. The successful implementation of RSW is a stated objective of the Councils' Strategic Business Plan and will deliver a transformational change as to how Children's Social Work engages with and delivers services ensuring children are safe and responsible. This vision is fully consistent with "children are our future" priority of Local Authority Outcome Improvement Plan.
- 1.1.2. The model is intended to be cost neutral by the end of the five year implementation period. Achieving this cost neutral position is contingent on recommissioning services from Third Sector partners as well as reducing the numbers of children placed in out of authority residential placements. While the proposed changes to the Unit model will reduce the cost of the model work is well underway to complete a recommissioning of all our services. Our ability to deliver on the second element has been affected by the recruitment challenges. Having a fully implemented Unit structure along with a newly commissioned Intensive Support service it is anticipated delivery on the second element will be significantly advanced in the coming year.

1.2. People

- 1.2.1. The Council's decision to support the implementation of RSW model is aimed at delivering improved outcomes for those children, and their families, assessed as being at risk of harm and in need of statutory intervention. The model seeks to free social work staff up from bureaucratic processes to deploy their knowledge and skills in direct work with children and families. In addition the model is intended to support more children to remain in their families resulting in a rebalancing the profile of the population of looked after children. An EHRIA was completed in respect of this report and additional measures were identified.
- 1.2.2. Evidence and direct feedback from children and families who have experienced this new model of delivery is encouraging and highlights that families feel more empowered to contribute to finding solutions to their own difficulties. These changes will diminish the reliance for some families on social work intervention and reduce the instances of children and families being re-referred. The impact of these changes will be incremental as more and more Units go live. An independent evaluation of the impact of the model is being undertaken and will be concluded in spring 2018.
- 1.2.3. The Care Inspectorate are working with the Scottish Government to develop a new model of Inspection for local authorities. This model will be confirmed in early 2018 with inspections commencing in April 2018. At some point over the coming months it is highly likely that aspects of Aberdeen City Children's Social Work Services will be inspected and providing evidence of the impact of RSW will be central to any inspection.

1.3. Place

- 1.3.1. The vast majority of social work services are delivered to families who experience economic deprivation. By supporting families to find solutions to their own difficulties and enhancing their resilience the effective delivery of social work services has an important role to play to positively improving the experience of living in Aberdeen.

1.4. Technology

- 1.4.1. A key driver within the RSW model is to free social work staff up from unnecessary bureaucratic processes. Modern technology has a valuable contribution to play and while some significant progress has been made there is still more to be achieved. Working with colleagues in ICT we are continuing to look at how professional social work time can be maximised to deliver direct work with families.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

9. APPENDICES (if applicable)

None

10. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Name	Graeme Simpson
Job title	Lead Service Manager
Email address	gsimpson@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Phone number	01224 523496

HEAD OF SERVICE DETAILS

Name	Bernadette Oxley
Job title	Head of Service/Chief Social Work Officer
Email address	boxley@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Phone number	01224 522110