

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

6 March 2023

NUMBER OF CHANGES OF SOCIAL WORKER FOR CARED FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Report of Tracy Jelfs, Head of Service Cared for Children and Provider Services

1. Purpose of the Report

A number of members of Corporate Parenting Board took part in the Changeable game on 7 February 2023. As a result, a request was made for a report to come to the Board in relation to the number of changes of Social Worker cared for and care experienced children and young people have, whilst in the care of Together for Children.

2. Introduction/Background

Historically in Together for Children there had been a significant use of agency Social Workers, due to an inability to recruit appropriately experienced workers. Teams were often made up of a high proportion of agency staff, with very few permanent staff (if any) in the team. Agency Social Workers, have different terms and conditions to permanent staff, and are only required to give one weeks' notice. This resulted in a high number of children and young people experiencing multiple workers, sometimes in short timeframes and often without knowing that their worker had left, as there was no time for an appropriate handover to the new worker. This was a concern for all children known to Children's Social Care at that time.

Stability within the social care workforce developed within Together for Children, with the permanent staff in the Senior Management Team all in post from mid-2019 and then permanent Team Managers also in post following this. This then further developed into increased permanent staff taking up Social Worker posts as well.

The data below shows the number of changes in Social Workers from 2018-2022, for cared for and care experienced children and young people, this data was available annually:

Year	Changes	Number of Children
18/19	892	435
19/20	604	362
20/21	599	381
21/22	576	389

3. Current Position

Although the trend of high usage of agency workers in many Local Authorities in England remains an issue, this has not been the case for Together for Children. The Senior Management Team in Children's Social Care had taken a number of steps from 2019 onwards to become a more competitive recruiter, for example, we increased the support offer to staff, developed creative advertising, flexibility with hours, established an effective programme for newly qualified Social Workers, all of which in turn, has created increased stability in the social care workforce.

Stability of our workforce is key in delivering good outcomes to children and young people and as such, there is now increased monthly monitoring of this. The Senior Leadership Team is sighted on this issue, via the development of the Meaningful Measures report, one aspect of which reports on changes in Social Workers for cared for and care experienced children. This has been established for this data stream monthly since December 2022.

The data below provides an overview of the changes and reasons for the change in Social Worker:

December 2022:

Reason	Number of Workers	Number of Children
Social Workers leaving TfC	1	1
Social Workers changing role in TfC	4	29
Social Workers off sick	2	7
Social Workers changed due to process	5	6
Child requested a change in Social Worker	1	1
Total	13	44

January 2023:

Reason	Number of Workers	Number of Children
Social Workers leaving TfC	0	0
Social Workers changing role in TfC	1	1
Social Workers off sick	1	13
Social Workers changed due to process	5	5
Total	7	19

The above information shows that 2 Social Workers were on sick leave with some children moving in December 2022 to new workers and others moving in January 2023.

One child requested a change in worker from a male to a female worker due to disclosures being made by children in the family of sexual harm and we felt that more disclosures may be made. The Team Manager progressed this request as this would be beneficial to support the child.

There remains increasing complexity regarding legislation and guidance across Children's Services and some specialist teams and ways of working are needed, to ensure the most effective support is provided to children and young people. This results in children moving to a different Social Worker as part of our processes and structure, noted as 'Social Workers changed due to process' above. This approach is kept under review by the Senior Management Team. The data shows relatively low numbers of children moving as a result of the process.

Some children prefer to have a change in Social Worker, for example, when they reach the conclusion of Court proceedings and prefer to have a new worker, who has not been involved in that aspect of their lives. In other instances, we work flexibly to reduce the number of changes. For example, a worker may be leaving the Permanence Team and a new worker would be allocated from within the team. However, if the child is approaching the age where Next Steps would take over the care planning, but perhaps not for 6 months, discussion would take place for the child to have a new worker in Next Steps earlier, as opposed to having two new workers, from two different teams, within a short space of time.

The year to date, continues to show an improving trend:

Year	Changes	Number of Children
01/04/2022- 14/02/23	320	220

From April 2023, Together for Children will be required to collate data regarding changes of Social Worker to the Department for Education. This will be reported in what is known as the 903 data return and provided for the first time in June 2024 for 23/24.

However, although there is increased stability in the workforce within Social Care, there will always be changes in staff, due to promotion, sickness absence or changes in personal circumstances, all of which could result in staff leaving. This is inevitable, the Senior Management Team and Team Managers within Children's Social Care continue to work to minimise the impact on children, when changes in worker occur.

4. Recommendation

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to accept this report for information only.