

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF MEMBER SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS AND DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

CONSULTATION WITH SOCIAL WORK STAFF

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider feedback from the Committee's visit to consult with social work staff from the North/West/South /East Locality Teams.

2. Background

- 2.1 In setting its work programme for the year, the Committee requested that members be provided with an opportunity to meet and receive feedback from social work staff.
- 2.2 To this end, arrangements have been made for a series of meetings with staff involved in each stage of a child's journey through social care; including:-
- a) Integrated Contact and Referral Team (ICRT) - this is where referrals into social care are screened and, if appropriate, assessments are undertaken;
 - b) Locality Teams - these teams work with children who are subject to child protection plans and those children who were looked after while subject to court proceedings;
 - c) Permanence Team - this team is responsible for children who are looked after permanently and have no plan to return home;
 - d) Next Steps Team – who are responsible for our care leavers
- 2.3 On 21 September 2016, Committee members met with social work staff belonging to the Next Steps Team. A feedback report on that visit was considered by the Committee on 6 October 2016.

3. Current Position

- 3.1 On 29th November 2016, a visit was arranged to meet with social work staff from the North/West/South/East locality teams.
- 3.2 The meeting took the form of an open discussion between members and staff on a range of issues facing the service. In summary these included:-
- The staff present felt they have been well informed about the establishment of Together for Children and other general developments. Management are considered open and accessible. Morale was felt to be very good and staff were confident in coming forward with any issues or to

seek guidance. Formal team meetings were held which were felt to be important for the exchange of best practice and information.

- In terms of workload the individual number of cases carried by social workers had fallen to a more manageable level. The backlog had been cleared and there was therefore more opportunity to carry out and plan work more effectively;
- Relationships and the sharing of information between partners was good. However there were concerns that due to staffing issues the Police had failed to be represented at some strategy meetings. This issue was being followed up by senior management.
- In terms of agency staff it was felt that they make an important contribution to the service though there were inevitably issues where staff leave frequently at short notice. It was important that this issue was managed carefully and standard and quality of work maintained. It was felt important for the Council to continue to develop its number of permanent staff through effective recruitment programmes, attractive conditions of service and a national and regional reputation of being a good employer.
- Staff very much looked forward to the introduction of the new system (Liquid Logic) which should help to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.
- Staff noted that the social and economic problems facing the city were increasing the demand on the service and the complexity of their work. However it was felt that the team had the skills and expertise to meet these demands.
- It was felt that additional admin support was important to allow social work staff to focus on the key areas of their work and reduce the time spent on administrative functions such as arranging meetings and coordinating other agencies. It was also important that admin staff had sufficient knowledge and experience of social work issues in order to allow them contribute fully to social services work.
- Concerns were expressed about the potential levels of safety at several social work premises such as Washington and the Coalfields. Given the sensitive nature of the work involved, it was important that every effort was made to help staff feel secure when going about their work. Also the closing of some buildings at 7.00pm was an issue for those members of staff who needed to stay later to complete a piece of work as a matter of urgency. It was noted that staff had been provided with laptops which had proved a great help in providing greater flexibility.

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The meeting with staff from the North/West/South /East Locality Teams was the second in a series of meetings with social work staff. The meeting provided the opportunity to seek the views of staff on the development of the service.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the feedback from social work staff based in the Locality Teams.

6. Glossary

None

7 Background Papers

None