
Decision Maker: EXECUTIVE

For Pre-decision scrutiny by Children, Education and Families PDS Committee on 4th October 2022

Date: 6 October 2022

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Key

Title: ADDITIONAL STAFFING CAPACITY FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

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Chief Officer: Richard Baldwin, Director of Children's Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 Current demand for support to vulnerable young people across Bromley has been gradually rising since 2018. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this demand, and we now have sustained levels of demand that are significantly higher than previously.
- 1.2 This continues to place pressure on many parts of Children's Social Care, but particularly on our "Front Door" services and "Safeguarding" service where the majority of our Child in Need cases and Child Protection cases are held.
- 1.3 Currently caseloads average 21 children per Social Worker (SW). The Bromley "Caseload Promise" which was an essential element of our pledge to Social Workers to provide them with the right environment in which to deliver good quality practice put a limit on cases of between 12-15 children. In order to maintain the quality of practice and ensure that we maintain can retain and attract good quality staff we wish to make a targeted investment in additional staff for a four-year period that will assist us in meeting the increased need over this period, whilst also allowing for an anticipated gradual reduction in demand as we move forward and are able to work more effectively utilising the additional staff.
- 1.4 This proposal seeks investment of £2.4 million over four years to allow for the initial recruitment of 20 additional SW posts. We will recruit 20 new posts in year one, and then reduce back down by 5 SWs in each subsequent year of the additional funding. We feel that the initial additional investment will allow a return to lower caseloads, which in turn will assist in making effective interventions with families that can lead to better and safer outcomes and ensure we are not involved in the lives of families for so long. These efficiencies will allow us to work more effectively and so gradually return to the current staffing numbers over the course of the funding.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) Subject to approval by the Council, Executive is asked to endorse and support the proposal of the time-limited funding for these additional staff (£2.4m).**
- (2) Executive is also asked to approve the use of £250k of Contingency monies to fund the short-term support to the Safeguarding Service. This is a one-off request.**
- (3) We propose the additional funding in the main part of this request to cover a period of four years. This will be achieved by the following measures -**
 - Anticipating a gradual reduction of demand over the next four years which will allow between 5-10 posts to be absorbed into existing agency SW posts and/or vacancies as they arise.**
 - The additional capacity will also allow for more effective working of cases ensuring that periods of intervention can be reduced, and cases closed sooner. This means that we should be able to reduce the overall number of open cases across the service by between 65-70 each year for the next four years.**
 - Therefore, the number of posts should be able to reduce by 5 posts per year over the duration of the four years to bring staff funding back into line with present capacity at the end of the four years.**

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: We anticipate that these measures will strengthen the delivery of services to vulnerable young people across the Borough and assist in meeting the current increased demand. The proposal also strengthens the Council's ability to attract and retain good quality staff.
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Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable:
 2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority:
 - (1) For children and young people to grow up, thrive, and have the best life chances in families who flourish and are happy to call Bromley home.
 - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean, and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
 - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost: 2.4 million over four years plus £250k one off
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost: yes, but decreasing over the course of four years
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Children's Social Care
 4. Total current budget for this head: £42.4m
 5. Source of funding: Core funding
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 20 additional Social Work staff
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: n/a
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement:
 2. Call-in: Applicable:
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected): This proposal would impact on approx. 300 young people.
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3.2 Drivers (Demand)

- (1) Post-pandemic we are seeing an increase in referrals into Children’s Social Care (figures provided below). The majority of referrals relate to children’s mental health and the impact of witnessing Domestic Abuse. The average waiting time figures from CAMHS also confirm and highlight the rise in concerns for young people’s mental health and well-being.
- (2) Complexity of concern; We have continued to maintain strong gatekeeping to prevent unnecessary receptions into the care system. Our numbers of Children Looked After has not changed significantly throughout the last four years. However, those children that are coming into care are presenting with a greater level of complexity. There continue to be children with concerns of neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, but these children are more recently presenting with over-laying, additional concerns such as mental health which appears to be linked to the impact of the pandemic.

3.3 Data (This is set out in the table below)

- (1) The table below sets out some of the key data which highlights the rise in referrals and cases over recent years. The March 2020 date is significant in that it is the last full month prior to lockdown and thus provides a good benchmark between pre- and post-pandemic levels of need.
- (2) The “per 10,000” figure provides a helpful way showing comparisons with other Local Authorities (LAs) (more fully set out in the second table), but also shows the rise in demand of the number of children open to Children’s Social Care for every 10,000 children in each LA. (i.e.; if you took a sample cohort of 10,000 children in Bromley at present, 536 of them would be open to CSC).
- (3) The final line on the table shows the impact this has on caseloads. As you will be aware the Bromley “caseload promise” is to stay between 12-15. Limiting caseloads means that we get higher quality, more effective practice. High caseloads were one of the key concerns in the Ofsted inspection of 2017. Nationally a caseload of 15 is now recognised as being appropriate.

	Mar-18	Mar-20	Mar-22
No. of Referrals	170	273	427
Referral Rate (Per 10,000)	320.4	391.3	536.55
Caseloads within the Safeguarding Service	14.5	15.2	21.1

- (4) In 2018 we ranked 9th out of the 11 “Statistical Neighbour” Local Authorities for our referral rates (i.e.; 9th lowest rate). By 2021 we had risen to 5th, and our 2022 figure shows a further rise from the 2021 figure.
- (5) This data shows that the rise is not just recent but is indicative of a gradual change and rise in demand over a longer period.
- (6) It is also interesting that Sutton (as a near South London neighbour) are now 3rd highest, indicative that other LAs are experiencing similar pressures and possibly faring less positively than us.

3.4 Mitigation (Steps/Actions already in Place to address these pressures;

- (1) We have secured an additional £500k from the CCG for 2022/23 to cover Residential costs.
- (2) We have kept/retained all the existing checks and balances in systems:
 - a. Practice Assurance Stocktakes (independent audits of practice to ensure thresholds, decision making and planning for children remain appropriate).
 - b. Practice Improvement Board; independently chaired to oversee all aspects of practice and decision making.
 - c. Safeguarding Partnership Board; independently chaired by Jim Gamble (renowned Child Protection expert)
 - d. Data Mondays; weekly analysis of performance and data.
 - e. Continued screening and gatekeeping of cases being referred into the service via the MASH.

3.5 We have also added the Following Over-sight;

- (1) Dip sampling of cases; to ensure we have a broader view of quality of practice (i.e.; greater volume of cases reviewed)
- (2) DCS meets weekly with Managers from the Safeguarding Service to review caseloads and closure of cases across this service area.
- (3) We have added short term capacity into the Safeguarding Service, focusing on
 - a. Closing cases
 - b. Moving cases in Early Help (whole services)
- (4) The increased demand in recent months has meant 35-40 cases coming into the Service each week, reducing the effectiveness of additional teams
- (5) These pressures are being experienced across all LAs

3.6 The Proposal;

3.6.1 This proposal will seek to bring caseloads back down to a level of between 12-15 cases per Social Worker, which is in line with the Bromley Caseload Promise and in line with accepted best practice across the profession.

3.6.2 The figure of 12-15 also mirrors practice in Camden who recently achieved an “Outstanding” grading in their recent Ofsted inspection (June 2022).

- (1) The financial support to assist in managing demand will be used to fund 20 additional permanent Social Work posts.
- (2) There are currently 50 permanent Social Worker posts in the Safeguarding Service. There are 1,067 children open across the service (as of 03/07/2022), meaning that the average caseload is 21.3 per Social Worker, with some Social Workers having caseloads in the mid-20s. This has an impact on the effectiveness and quality of practice.
- (3) These measures mean that we will be able to bring caseloads down to 14/15 and remain in line with the Bromley Caseload Promise.
- (4) The annual cost of a permanent Social Worker is £58k per year (with on-costs). This means that the cost in year one would be £1.16 million (part year effect £667k) and would then reduce by £290k each subsequent year. The figure requested also anticipates some additional headroom to cover anticipated additional staff cost rises over the duration of the request.

This means the total size of the first part of the request will be £2.4 million.

Additional Staffing costs;					
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Costs of Additional staff;	677	1,160	1,160	1,160	1,160
Cost Reduction (Reduction of Staff)		-290	-580	-870	1,160
Draw on Resources	677	870	580	290	0

- (5) The second part of this request is to seek agreement for an additional spend of £250k from the contingency to fund two teams of Social Workers (x10) for six months.
- (6) These Social Workers will be deployed to move a large number of Child in Need cases to closure or to “step down” into the Early Help service where continuing support may be required, but necessarily require a Social Worker to support this.

4 IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

- 4.1 The report seeks to strengthen the quality of practice for vulnerable young children by ensuring that current caseloads can be reduced and ensure a more consistent level of good practice across the Division.

5 TRANSFORMATION/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The additional staff will be employed according to existing job descriptions and person specifications.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.2 Please see main report. The proposal seeks temporary funding of £2.4 million over a four-year period to assist in reducing caseloads for Children’s Social Workers. The funding will come from the Council contingency sum.
- 6.3 There is also a request for £250k as a one off to cover short term costs in the safeguarding service. This will also be found from the contingency sum
- 6.4 Costs of staffing will reduce year on year as over four years and will reduce the cost burden to zero.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 HR are already engaged in preparing for a potential increase in recruitment activity.

8. CUSTOMER IMPACT

- 8.1 This proposal would impact on approx. 300 young people.

Non-Applicable Headings:	Legal Implications, Procurement Implications, Property Implications, Carbon Reduction and Social Value Implications, Ward Councillor Views
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	None