

Children and Families Social Work Practice Team Staffing and Risk Management

The City of Edinburgh Council

18 March 2004

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To advise the Council of the present position regarding staffing levels in the Children and Families Practice Teams.
- 1.2 To advise the Council of the present position regarding the allocation of cases within Children and Families Practice Teams.

2. Summary

- 2.1 This report describes the staffing situation of Children and Families Social Work Practice teams. A vacancy level for social workers of 16% for much of last year rose to 20.5% by the end of January. After taking into account long term absences from posts and temporary appointments, 25% of social worker posts were vacant.
- 2.2 This report compares the levels of unallocated cases between end of March and end of December 2003. Unallocated cases across all categories have increased: looked after children by 28%, not-looked after children by 119%.
- 2.3 This report describes the professional and practice considerations in the decisions to allocate cases or hold them as unallocated.

3. Main report

Staffing Details

General

- 3.1 An overview of the past three years reveals a steady rise in the level of unfilled vacancies in the practice teams. For most of the past year the vacancy rate for permanent posts for professionally qualified social workers in Children and Families practice teams has been 16%.
- 3.2 At end of December 2003 18% of the 118.1 (FTE) main grade social worker posts were vacant and available for permanent recruitment purposes. This figure rose to 20.5% by the end of January 2004. When this is adjusted to reflect the effective operational position (see note below) the figure increases to 25% at the end of

January 2004. The vacancy rate and operational vacancy rate for end of February 2004 are projected to be 22% and 27% respectively.

Reference period	Vacancy Rate %	Operational Vacancy Rate %
3 year average to end 2003	16	-
End December 2003	18	-
End January 2004	20.5	25
End February 2004	22	27

$$\text{Vacancy Rate} = \frac{\text{Permanent vacancies}}{\text{Establishment}} \times 100$$

Operational Vacancy Rate = Vacancy Rate adjusted to reflect long term absences such as sickness, maternity leave, temporary secondments out of Children and Families and temporary cover / secondments brought in.

Practice team Managers

3.3 There has been little movement or change in permanent practice team manager postholders in Children and Families over the past year. Because of its pivotal nature the effective staffing level has been maintained at 100% by acting up arrangements where necessary.

Senior Social Workers

3.4 Six appointments have been made in the last six months of 2003 and current staffing is 100%. However, it took eleven separate advertisements to achieve this. This recruitment followed extensive advertising and response rates to adverts placed were generally disappointing. This poor response to adverts is a relatively new phenomenon.

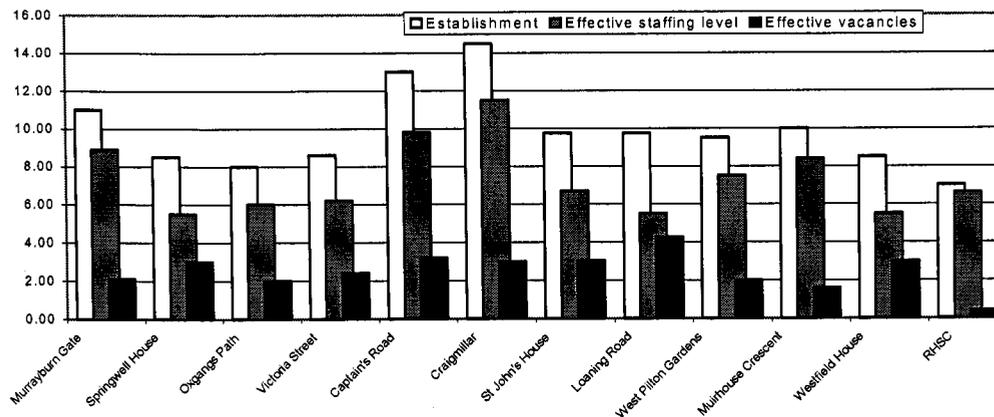
Senior practitioners

3.5 Most of the movement among senior practitioner posts has been caused by acting up arrangements and by temporary secondments. 2.3 of 7 posts are effectively vacant using the operational vacancy measure.

Social Workers

3.6 The level of social worker vacancies increased steadily but relatively slowly between 2000 and October 2003. However the figure relating to actual, vacant posts rose from 16% in October last year to 20.5 % by the end of January 2004.

Social Worker Staffing Levels by Practice team
(Projected to end January 2004)



3.7 The above graph shows that no teams are unaffected but the vacancies are very unevenly spread. Craighilliar is the worst hit at 45% with Springwell and Westfield Houses each at 35%.

4 Implications

4.1 The impact on services and, in particular, the ability to allocate cases and progress care plans is severe and has necessitated management action in order to minimise risk.

4.2 The impact on staff is also severe at all levels. The absence of social workers means that a higher proportion of the time of those remaining will be taken up in maintaining a duty system for new referrals and dealing with unavoidable and crisis work in the unallocated cases.

4.3 The Department has a target case load of 19 children for an experienced social worker who has been in their present post for at least six months. The average number of allocated cases per qualified social worker as at September 2003 was 21, irrespective of experience or length of employment. The significant majority of these cases are high need or risk.

4.4 Even with a full complement of staff it would not be possible to restrict caseloads to 19 without some unallocated work. This gives rise to the need to make the most effective use of professional social workers' time. This work will be supported by a review of administrative support to social workers and the proposed replacement to the client information system.

4.5 Experience and practice elsewhere has suggested that a realistic caseload in these circumstances would be 14 children. Following the Laming recommendation that child protection work should only be allocated to suitable, trained and experienced workers with available time, Harringey Council has reduced caseloads to 13 per worker. This would require an increase in main grade establishment in the order of 41 WTE posts. However, it is recognised that at the

present time there is not the pool of potential employees from which to recruit any additional staff.

- 4.6 It is important to hold to a policy of manageable caseloads. A system which would have cases allocated through other means would merely result in further stress and difficulty for the staff.
- 4.7 More and more of the Senior Social Workers' and Practice Team Managers' time is going into monitoring and re-prioritising new and unallocated work. This inevitably reduces the time available for other management tasks such as planned supervision and networking with other agencies.
- 4.8 For Social Workers and Senior Social Workers there is recognition and recompense for overtime. In some instances, the overtime will be taken as time in lieu, further reducing the time available for tasks.

5 Allocation of Cases

Overview

- 5.1 The total number of **unallocated cases** has doubled during 2003.

Percentage increases are highest for children on the Child Protection Register (but not looked after), children with disabilities and children on home supervision. Not looked after children have added most to the overall total.

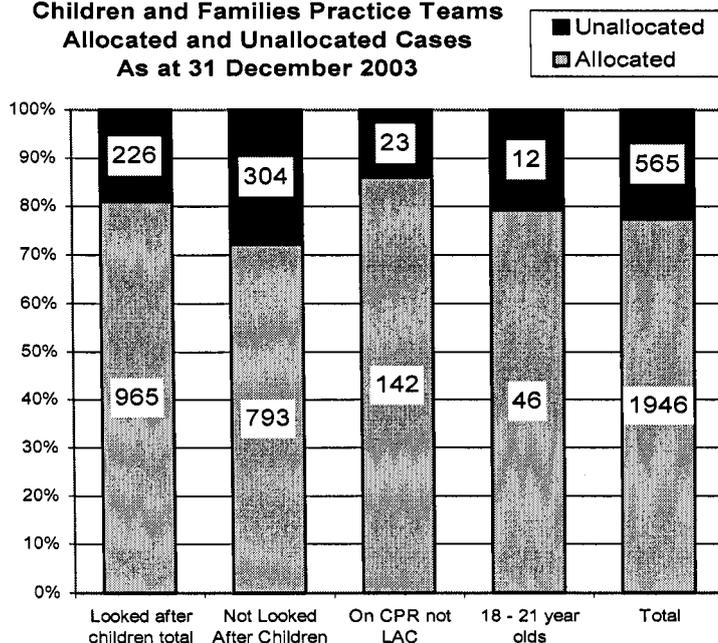
	Looked after children			Not LAC			Total
	At home	Away from home	On CPR	With disabilities	Others	18 - 21 year olds	
March	46	71	3	23	133	5	281
September	91	91	17	62	153	3	417
December	96	130	23	57	247	12	565

Present position

- 5.2 As at 31 December 2003, 1857 children had an allocated social worker, of whom 965 were looked after, 142 were on the Child Protection Register and not looked after, 46 were 18-21 year olds and 793 other children.

	Looked after children total	Not Looked After Children	On CPR not LAC	18 - 21 year olds	Total
Unallocated	226	304	23	12	565
Allocated	965	793	142	46	1946
Total	1191	1097	165	58	2511

**Children and Families Practice Teams
Allocated and Unallocated Cases
As at 31 December 2003**



5.3 Of the cases requiring allocation by statute or policy/procedure or assessed as needing services, 77% overall were allocated.

The decision to allocate

- 5.4 The decision not to allocate or de-allocate, is a management one and is never taken lightly. It only comes into play when there are not insufficient staff hours to take the cases.
- 5.5 Practice team managers and seniors review caseloads and unallocated work regularly. They seek to ensure that cases are closed when they can be and cases are allocated or reallocated if possible having taken account of needs and risks.
- 5.6 In some instances other services or agencies might be involved with the child and/or family thus reducing the immediate need for re-allocation especially if they agree to increase their input. This could apply in many types of cases including child protection registrations. The non allocation of a practice team social worker is sometimes incorrectly interpreted as no service being provided. The caseload of a departing member of staff will be rigorously reviewed.
- 5.7 Some looked after children may be of low risk or need – children in settled long-term placements away from home for example or children on home supervision where problems have reduced.
- 5.8 New contacts or information about an unallocated child will be passed on to the teams' management staff and the allocation decision reviewed. Crises or essential work will usually be dealt with by a duty social worker or sometimes by the senior with the most knowledge of the case.
- 5.9 All unallocated cases will be actively reviewed periodically. This process includes contact with the family – often through the duty system.

5.10 Other management action taken includes the Acting Director of Social Work having written to other agencies outlining the staffing and allocation difficulties.

Statutory, compulsory, obligatory, voluntary or preventative?

5.11 Reference is often made to “statutory” or “non statutory” cases, with the former normally meaning looked after children and child protection registrations. Since all social work powers and duties are founded in statute this is not always a helpful distinction. For example, the assessment of needs of children with disabilities is a statutory duty.

5.12 The issue is whether there is any compulsion on the client to accept a service or any compulsion or additional obligation on the local authority to provide it. The compulsion or additional obligation can come from legislation such as supervision requirements or policy such as child protection registrations.

5.13 For anyone taking the traditional view of “statutory cases” as above, the proportion and number of allocated children who are not looked after nor on the Child Protection register may seem high, especially when some looked after children and CPR cases are unallocated.

5.14 “Not looked after children” includes:

- children with or affected by disabilities requiring assessment and services. Assessment in this instance is a statutory duty and many such children or their carers have high needs;
- all new referrals requiring to be assessed and all cases undergoing assessment including;
- requests from the reporter for social background reports and
- new child protection referrals;
- children where further need or significant harm is very likely if no service is given;
- children where compulsory measures or child protection procedures might be justified but they are not necessary because of the parent’s present co-operation or the assistance of friends or relatives;
- children who should be looked after away from home but there are no suitable resources and support and non compulsory supervision are sustaining the situation.

5.15 Allocation decisions must, therefore, be based primarily on comparative risk and need with the level of legal obligation or compulsion being an important but not paramount consideration.

Section 104 Anti Social Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill

- 5.16 Non allocation of a case may lead to a situation where the Department cannot give effect to a condition of a supervision requirement. If Section 104 of the Anti Social Behaviour (Scotland) Bill is passed this could well become a matter for the Sheriff Principal and lead to an order requiring implementation. Failure to do so may lead to contempt proceedings.
- 5.17 Given the current level of vacancies in social worker posts, the possibility of the Department not being able to allocate cases of this type is a distinct possibility.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 Effective staffing levels and numbers of permanent staff in post in Children and Families Practice Teams continue to reduce with consequent increases in workload, pressure and stress on those who remain. As a result, the numbers of cases that are unallocated are growing.
- 6.2 Growing numbers of children's cases are of necessity unallocated to a social worker with consequent effects on the level of service provided and on the Council's ability to fulfil its statutory duties. The management actions outlined in the report will help to reduce but not eliminate risks.
- 6.3 The Department will continue its consideration of measures that may improve the recruitment and retention of social work staff especially qualified social workers in children and families.
- 6.4 The Department will give further consideration to the salary scales and employment conditions of senior staff following revisions to the payment scheme for main grade staff.
- 6.5 The Department will give consideration to the establishment levels of main grade and supervisory staff in the practice teams.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The 2004/5 budget includes an additional £798,000 to fund the cost of the revised grading for basic grade social workers and occupational therapists which was implemented on 1 January 2004.
- 7.2 A review of the grading of senior staff is currently being undertaken. The cost implications are currently unknown.
- 7.3 Given the national shortage of qualified social workers, further work is required on how to proceed with a reduction in children and families social worker caseloads. This will include consideration regarding the use of IT and new ways of working. The monies allocated in the budget for the implementation of the O'Brien recommendations includes £150,000 in 2004/05 for additional staffing.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Council:

- 8.1 notes the increasingly difficult staffing situation in Children and Families practice teams;
- 8.2 receives a further report on the remuneration arrangements for Senior and other staff;
- 8.3 receives a further report on staffing establishments in the Practice Teams;
- 8.4 requests a report from the Council Solicitor on the implications of section 104 of the Anti-social Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Bill;
- 8.5 notes that the Acting Director of Social Work has written to other agencies about these staffing and allocation problems for their information;
- 8.6 notes the management action taken to prioritise work for allocation.



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Appendices	None
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Wards affected	All
Background Papers	None