

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	8 February 2022
Title:	Annual Principal Social Worker Report
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide the panel with a high-level briefing of the roles and responsibilities of the Hampshire Children and Families Principal Social Worker and to update the panel on the current and future priorities of this role.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1. The Panel is aware of and notes the role and work of the Hampshire Children and Families Principal Social Worker.

3 Executive Summary

- 3.1. This report seeks to provide the Children and Families Advisory Panel with an overview of the role and activities of the Hampshire Children and Families Principal Social Worker in 2021.
- 3.2. Hampshire's Children and Families Principal Social Worker (PSW) role came into being in 2017. Recommendation 14 of the Munro¹ report of 2011 states that 'Local Authorities should designate a Principal Child and Family Social Worker, who is a senior manager with lead responsibility for practice in the local authority and who is still actively involved in frontline practice and who can report the views and experiences of the front line to all levels of management.'

¹ Professor Eileen Munro's government commissioned review of child protection (2011) in England urged ministers to back a set of reforms designed to cut bureaucracy and place more trust in professionals. Munro set out 15 recommendations in this report that included reform proposals to enable professionals to make the best judgements to help children, young people and families.

- 3.3. In Hampshire, the objectives of this role as agreed by the Children and Families Management Team are listed below:
- Continuous professional development, high quality practice placements and the creation of a learning environment in which excellent social work can flourish.
 - Quality assurance monitoring of front-line social work practice and the provision of advice, guidance and direction to ensure the implementation of best practice across the whole social work / social care workforce.
 - Become a key communication link between front-line staff and senior management, to ensure that the views and experiences of front-line staff are given due regard in operational and strategic decision-making processes.
- 3.4 The core aim of this role is to ensure strategic direction and decision making is informed by the realities of social work practice. The PSW is a key link in the feedback loop and links the real-life experience of those who deliver and manage social work with those on the receiving end of practice. This brief is fulfilled through providing leadership and driving excellent practice through the development of our practice model and the Hampshire Approach which underpins this model, including assessment, planning, decision making and direct work with children and families.
- 3.5 It is worth noting that the PSW role profile can vary depending on the local authority, where some appoint to a dedicated Principal Social Worker post, while many other local authorities have a hybrid role. In Hampshire, the functions of the Principal Social Worker are embedded in the Service Development Lead role and shared with the Assistant Head of Workforce Development, who leads on student placements including apprenticeships, training of newly qualified social workers and aspects of the role that fall under the learning and continuing professional development umbrella.
- 3.6 In 2021, the PSW continued to have an active role in shaping the branch's approach to continuous improvement and service development and specifically the Hampshire Approach. The profile of the role has been raised which results in positive and supportive interactions with staff who now proactively contact the PSW to discuss their career aspirations, wellbeing and barriers that they are facing in their work.
- 3.7 Since March 2021, the PSW has had the strategic lead for Participation which fits with the continuous improvement aspect of the role and looks to shape our organisational strategic priorities in line with what we are hearing from the people we work with and for – our children and families.
- 3.8 Staff wellbeing continues to be an important driver for the role with several discussions at branch management level and with the Deputy Director about how this should look in day to day interactions and more targeted programmes designed to address this.

- 3.9 The commitment by the organisation's senior leaders and the PSW to anti racist practice and tackling structural barriers to equality has led among other initiatives, to the development and successful roll out of the Resilience in Social Work sessions for our newly qualified social workers from ethnic minority backgrounds.

4 Contextual information

The PSW role - Supporting our Staff

- 4.1 Wellbeing – The PSW has met with several groups of staff to discuss their wellbeing during 2021. This has been both as planned sessions during peer inspections and also in response to a request from the relevant district or service manager or the PSW Buddy for that service. These sessions have been held with staff in Children's Reception Team, MASH, Fostering, Children's Adoption Team, New Forest, Eastleigh and Winchester, Basingstoke, Workforce Development, Fareham and Gosport, Swanwick Lodge (x3), Hart and Rushmoor and East Hants. There have also been wellbeing sessions with team managers on the request of their respective district managers in Fareham and Gosport and New Forest districts.
- 4.2 The PSW meets with individual staff at their request or at the request of their manager. These meetings have had a varied focus – career progression, sharing of ideas or good practice, difficulties to do with their job role and to discuss how they can support their team as a manager.
- 4.3 Developing a HCC wellbeing offer – the PSW is working with HR and Occupational Health to develop a comprehensive offer for staff in the C&F Branch that looks to address trauma experienced by staff due to the work they undertake. An options paper is being drawn up by Sandy Gregory, Senior HR to present to CFMT.
- 4.4 Social Work Survey – Following from the conclusions of the social work survey in 2019 and in line with the recommendations of the Social Work Survey Report, the PSW led the development and roll out of the Social Work Survey 2021 in April. The survey tool was developed based on the previous survey tool but with a section added on to reflect practice during the Covid 19 pandemic and the impact on staff. This report was presented to CFMT and the recommendations were agreed. The findings of the survey were shared with staff in the C&F branch reflecting a 'you said, we did' approach. [Children and Families Social Work Survey \(sharepoint.com\)](https://sharepoint.com)
- 4.5 Exit Interviews – Managers in Workforce Development continue to carry out Exit Interviews for social workers when notified by the C& F Branch. Notification to Workforce Development when someone leaves should be as soon as possible after the resignation is received (or prior for the opportunity to have a 'retention' discussion). Workload, feeling of being valued and work/life balance appear to be key reasons for people moving on. There is a recommended focus in 2022 to improve the use of Valuing Performance

discussions as a strategy to promote retention among other initiatives in the branch, including the review of the marker supplement and the creation of the senior social worker role.

- 4.6 Sessions with Graduate Trainees at the 3 month point in the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) - The PSW and the Assistant Head of Workforce Development meet with the successive cohorts of social workers in their ASYE year to raise their awareness on the role of the PSW, to discuss strengths-based practice in Hampshire and how they can develop a successful career as a social worker in Hampshire. It is also an appropriate time to get feedback on how the first three months in practice has been (which is generally very positive). A similar session has also been held with staff on the Social Work Apprenticeship programme.
- 4.7 PSW Buddies - The PSW Buddy network is well established and is an effective communication channel between the PSW, staff in districts and CFMT. It is positive that most districts/services have identified a PSW buddy.
- 4.8 Resilience in Social Work – The PSW has led a working group which has developed a programme of support for colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds in their first and second year of social work practice. This piece of work originated from a desire to maximise the chances of success for BAME workers when it was identified that a disproportionate number in this group were being put on performance plans or failing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. This is similar to the national trend seen in this area and requires commitment from sector leaders on a national and local level to address structural inequalities in relation to race. Part of this commitment is shown through the work undertaken through this working group. The work will be presented to the wider children and families management team to discuss further steps.

[BAME GT Resilience Group Presentation DM Workshop](#)

5 The PSW role - Supporting outstanding practice to flourish

- 5.1 Joining meetings of the branch management team (CFMT) – in February 2021, the PSW was invited to join CFMT meetings on a fortnightly basis to provide a frontline practice perspective and a regular sense check on staff wellbeing and morale. It has been a useful lens to apply, especially in relation to CFMT's function of 'holding the ring' and being accountable for the performance of the service and the quality of the work delivered to children and their families. The PSW has participated in discussions on service development and has been able to offer some unique insight especially in the area of staff wellbeing and their views on practicing in a pandemic. The PSW role sits within the Service Development team which serves to link the diverse aspects of social work practice and management, discussed within CFMT meetings, with continuous improvement work. The strategic leads held by the PSW for Hampshire Approach, IT and Participation also enriches any contribution made.

- 5.2 Practice and Covid – Along with other members of the wider children and families management team, the PSW has contributed to discussion regarding social work practice in Covid, the learning and development of staff and the shaping of future services for children and families. Some examples include contribution to the Independent Reviewing Service Review, the Right Place, Right Time Project and the Department for Education project on Safeguarding during Covid.
- 5.3 Hampshire Approach – There is a substantial programme of work in train to further increase the confidence and skill of staff in using the Hampshire Approach. Work led by the PSW has resulted in the launch of the Hampshire Approach Celebration Month on 6 January 2022 with learning sessions, reflective practice circles, resources for the toolkit and guest speakers being the highlights of the month.
- 5.4 Improving how we work with families from ethnic minority backgrounds – The PSW has undertaken a third round of audits in Havant and Test Valley districts to quality assure the work we undertake with BME families and ensure we are thinking of any strategic priorities in this area. There has been ongoing work with practitioners to raise awareness and knowledge and also increase confidence in interacting with families and colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- 5.5 Review of the Children and Families Toolkit and link with the development of C2C Mosaic (the incoming social care recording system) – There has been extensive work undertaken under the direction of the PSW by the Project Officer on refining and improving the toolkit. There is also a proposal in train to look at the digital platform we use to store our toolkit and bring this in line with advances in technology now available to HCC.
- 5.6 Liaison with Principal Social Worker Adult Health and Care (AHC) – Following an initial meeting with the Jess Hutchinson, PSW AHC, there is now liaison between the two departments so we can collaborate and gain mutual benefit. The topic areas identified include:
- Workforce Development and commonality of learning/development needs for CSD and AHC
 - Recruitment and Retention
 - Quality Assurance - strengthening the approach and culture within AHC
 - Participation - engaging our children/families/service users for service development.

There is a proposal to work more formally and systematically with AHC colleagues to share knowledge and practice wisdom and the draft terms of reference have been developed.

- 5.7 Skills for Care visit – Our Children’s Workforce Development successfully hosted a visit where the Children’s ASYE programme was evaluated by Skills for Care². The focus of the visit was Covid working, inclusion and diversity with a focus on anti-racist practice and the role of the ASYE Assessor. The PSW was part of the senior managers’ panel that met with the Skills for Care team to talk about these focus areas. The visit was a resounding success and Skills for Care fed back that they did not have any areas of development to recommend to Hampshire County Council Children’s Services.
- 5.8 NQSW Panel – The PSW is part of the moderation panel that agrees the PASS/FAIL of the ASYEs on each cohort of the Graduate Trainee Programme. As part of this, an ASYE’s portfolio is reviewed in detail and feedback comments are provided to the Practice Educator, Assessor and ASYE.
- 5.9 Data related work – The PSW has been involved in data analysis related projects like the Social Care Demand Modelling project and Nuffield Project to provide social work input and think about how the intelligent use of data can enhance our service provision in Social Care.
- 5.10 Liaison with other Local Authorities, HSCP and other sector organisations – the PSW is a member of the PSW South East Regional Network which includes the Isle of Wight, Southampton, Portsmouth, Wokingham, Bracknell Forest and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. As part of representing Children’s Social Care in the HSCP, the PSW sits on the Workforce Development subgroup and the Child Sexual Abuse working group. The PSW also liaises with external organisations like Community Care, What Works Centre, NAAS and Social Work England to share and contribute to excellent social work practice.
- 5.11 Communication Site and Yammer Page – The PSW has a presence on the Children and Families communication site and also runs a Yammer page to maximise the reach of corporate, practice and wellbeing messaging to staff.

6 Finance

- 6.1 There are no direct finance implications for this report.

7 Performance

- 7.1 The report picks up on impact on performance and service delivery in previous sections.

² Skills for Care is an independent charity that has been appointed by the Department for Education (DfE) to manage the support to child and family services with the delivery of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme. In addition to advising the employer on the ASYE programme they also have a quality assurance function for the programme.

8 Consultation and Equalities

8.1 This has been picked up in points 15, 16, 19 and 23 in this report.

9 Climate Change Impact Assessment

9.1 There is no direct impact in relation to climate change. The majority of meetings attended by the PSW since March 2020 are virtual thus minimising the need for several staff members to travel to one central location by car and consequently mitigating the environmental impact.

9.2 The carbon mitigation tool and climate change adaptation tool were not applicable because this report relates to the role and work of the PSW and is strategic/administrative in nature.

10 Conclusions

10.1 The Principal Social Worker role is an embedded part of practice and service delivery in Hampshire. It is a dynamic and varied role which comes with the opportunity to shape services and influence decision making. It also comes with challenges that are faced by many PSWs in a 'hybrid' role – the need to constantly review and make critical choices about which strategic area is a priority for children, families, colleagues, managers and the organisation.

10.2 The role has gone from strength to strength and is a recognised and defined role within the branch. We are in the position of being able to strengthen and refine our services because of our strong performance and practice, with a skilled and committed workforce.

10.3 There is robust governance of the role and functions of the PSW and a clear line of accountability, under the overarching umbrella of whole system change with the Hampshire Approach and strength based working.

10.4 It is clear as the pandemic becomes part of 'normal' life, that it has had and continues to have an impact on people's ability to seek support and feel connected. It is worth recognising the adaptive leadership that has been evident in the past 23 months. It is important to keep going – to remain strength based and plan ahead, with a clear focus on people who make the organisation what it is. The inextricable link between wellbeing and retention is being explored through various initiatives.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
N/A	
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
N/A	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None