

## SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday 3 December, 2020
<b>Report Subject</b>	Supporting the Social Work Workforce
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cabinet Member for Social Services
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Social Services)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sudden onset of the coronavirus global pandemic has impacted on how the education and training of social worker students this academic year and those social workers in their first year in practice has been managed. As part of the social work degree, students are expected to undertake and pass at least 200 days of assessed practice learning. This is a requirement of Social Care Wales who are the regulators of social work training.

Unfortunately, this year many final practice learning opportunity placements were ended before the full number of days were completed to ensure both the safety and wellbeing of students and those individuals receiving our services. This has meant that students have had to evidence how they have met the requirements of the degree in different ways than would normally be expected. It is recognised that although they have still had to meet the required standards set down in the framework above, they will not have had the same opportunities to put theory into practice through work placements.

This report provides an overview of the additional work being undertaken to support the Council's newly qualified social workers, whose programme of study has been disrupted by COVID-19.

The report also provides details of the programme of learning and development created to further support social workers from their first year in practice through to experienced practitioner. This programme follows The First Three Years in Practice Guidance document developed by Social Care Wales and Care Inspectorate Wales to support with social workers' development after qualifying.

A link to the framework for the Social Work degree in Wales and Supplementary Guidance to the Rules which accompany it, is provided in the list of Accessible Background Documents (section 6.0).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members are informed of the impact of the COVID pandemic on social work learning and development.
2	Members note the Council's work supporting the current newly qualified social workers.
3	Members are informed of our proposal for the development of First Year in Practice Social Workers through to Experienced Practitioners.

## REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID PANDEMIC ON SOCIAL WORKER PRACTICE</b>
1.01	<b>Newly Qualified Social Workers</b>
1.02	The majority of social workers employed by Flintshire County Council achieve their BA (Hons) Social Work degree through Glyndŵr University in Wrexham. To complete the degree, students will have undertaken 3 work placements (known as Practice Learning Opportunities) arranged and hosted by the three local authorities affiliated to the university (Flintshire, Wrexham and Denbighshire). We do also have students undertaking their degrees via the Open University but these students are fewer in number.
1.03	The Practice Learning Opportunities amount to 200 days over the 3 years of the degree and are a substantial part of the student's programme of learning, equating to half of the required learning hours. Each year the placement days at the learning opportunity increases so that in the final year 100 days are completed on placement, (year 1: 20 days, year 2: 80 days and year 3: 100 days).
1.04	Similarly, the degree with the Open University has a practice learning opportunity each year, (year 1: 20 days, year 2: 90 days and year 3: 90 days).
1.05	The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions this year meant that in particular third year Practice Learning Opportunities for social work students were interrupted.
1.06	Universities across the UK took differing approaches to supporting final 3 <sup>rd</sup> year students towards tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their placements.
1.07	Glyndŵr University assessed all students on their 3 <sup>rd</sup> year placement using course work and observations by appropriate staff. This evidence was measured against the National Occupational Standards (NOS) to ascertain if they met the requirements. Those students with insufficient evidence were then asked to provide further reflective case study examples around work that they had undertaken. If the case studies were still deemed as insufficient evidence towards the NOS then the students

	have been asked to complete a final Practice Learning Opportunity. The Practice Learning Opportunities have recently commenced.
1.08	The Open University took a different approach and after briefly suspending the Practice Learning Opportunities, the university then recommenced the completion of virtual work to complete the course.
1.09	A fundamental part of the social worker role is the personal element, meeting with individuals face-to-face, promoting positive communications and building positive relationships. The idea of 'virtual' or 'remote' practice, for some practitioners is perplexing and thought-provoking. Newly qualified social workers who would have delivered face to face services during their 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> year placements, have had to adapt in order to provide these services virtually, since starting work as new Social Workers.
1.10	To assist these new staff as they work from home, managers and supervisors are supporting individuals with the technical aspects of home working and the increased confidentiality requirements.
1.11	As a newly qualified social worker the support offered by the team is invaluable. In these different times these social workers are being helped to keep in touch with team members through weekly virtual meetings, the setting up 'buddy systems' where workers have colleagues that they can ring or message to discuss queries, team chat facilities using WhatsApp, messenger groups, and mentors to work alongside new members of the team.
1.12	Isolation can be difficult and stressful and all our workers have access to mental health and wellbeing support through Occupation Health as well as the mental wellbeing programme commissioned by Flintshire Social Services, Mindline and the national Social Care Wales COVID-19 Health & Social Care Wellbeing Resources are available to staff.
1.13	To embed practices and support with the practical work, all newly qualified social workers have been out shadowing with their supervisors to give an opportunity for them to engage in wider discussion, increase their confidence and identify learning. Supervisors have also made arrangements for virtual visits with other teams and agencies to get to know them and their work.
1.14	Finally, to support professional development, the Service Managers have worked with Community Care Inform to launch a dedicated Flintshire County Council pages specifically for the use of the authority's social workers. The pages brings together relevant case law, legislation and practice as well as access to Flintshire staffing structures, help individuals identify key staff in their services areas and provide contact details.
1.15	<b>Developing our Social Workers</b>
1.16	The recruitment of experienced social workers remains a challenge and the Council has taken steps to develop our own social workers by putting in place a programme of development to support newly qualified social workers to become experienced practitioners.
1.17	The Council has an opportunity to get to know the students during their Practice Learning Opportunities in both years 2 and 3 of their Social Work

	degrees. Offering these individuals work opportunities means that the students come to us already familiar with the authority's processes, procedures and culture.
1.18	During the first year in practice, the newly qualified social worker's learning needs, as identified in their final year as a student, are carried forward into their First Year in Practice. Newly qualified social workers meet with their managers and a member of the Workforce Development Team to review these development needs and build a programme of induction around them. Newly qualified social workers are expected to bring their portfolio to the workplace and share with their team manager, as this is where the learning and development recommendations are found. This plan is then reviewed as recommended in the framework at 6 months and then 12 months
1.19	To support social workers in their First Year in Practice, peer group sessions have been organised and commenced in September 2020, giving opportunity to share experiences, share good practice, and reflect on their first working experiences. These were originally planned to be available quarterly but due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, group sessions are now be offered monthly.
1.20	Training that is usually completed in face to face has been transferred online with the majority of the courses now being provided via Webex or Zoom.
1.21	The First Year in Practice personal development and learning plan allows practioners to demonstrate their progression and evidence their readiness to progress onto the Consolidation Programme.
1.22	The Consolidation Programme is a course of study which has to be completed before a newly qualified social worker can re-register after their 3 <sup>rd</sup> year in practice.

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	For newly qualified social workers there will be an increase of mentors required resulting in more staff time necessary to support the new workforce.  Additional IT equipment will also be required.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT</b>
3.01	N/A

<b>4.00</b>	<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
4.01	N/A

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	Appendix 1 – Executive Summary COVID Survey  Appendix 2 – COVID-19 Workforce Survey

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<p>The framework for the Social Work degree in Wales and Supplementary Guidance to the Rules which accompany it.  <a href="https://socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/regulation-of-social-work-education-and-training">https://socialcare.wales/learning-and-development/regulation-of-social-work-education-and-training</a></p> <p>First Three Years In Practice Guidance Document  <a href="https://socialcare.wales/resources/the-first-three-years-in-practice">https://socialcare.wales/resources/the-first-three-years-in-practice</a></p> <p>Social Care Wales – COVID 19 Health and Wellbeing Resources  <a href="https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/health-and-well-being-resources-to-support-you-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic">https://socialcare.wales/service-improvement/health-and-well-being-resources-to-support-you-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic</a></p> <p>Health and Social care workers’ quality of working life and coping while working during the Covid-19 pandemic 7<sup>th</sup> May – 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020, findings from UK Survey:  <a href="http://www.ulster.ac.uk">www.ulster.ac.uk</a></p>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Allison Lowry-Phillips  <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 702951  <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:Allison.lowry-phillips@flintshire.gov.uk">Allison.lowry-phillips@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
8.01	<p><b>(1) Social Care Wales</b> the regulator for the social care workforce since April 2017. Sets standards for the care and support workforce, making them accountable for their work. Developing the workforce so they have the knowledge and skills to protect, empower and support those who need help.</p> <p><b>(2) Practice Learning Opportunities</b> provide students with the opportunity to work with service users and build professional relationships. These opportunities can be statutory, voluntary or independent sector agencies.</p> <p><b>(3) Mentors</b> provide motivation, emotional support, goal setting, developing contacts and identifying resources.</p> <p><b>(4) Onsite Supervisor Role</b> is the link into the site of practice, and so is responsible for organising an induction programme for the student. Supervisors also choose relevant work for their student and give them day to day guidance and advice.</p>

**(5) Practice Educator** role is to teach, supervise and assess social worker students on their placements during training to become a social worker. They improve standards in social work education, maintaining the quality of practice placements for social work students.

**(6) Practice Assessment Panel** membership is drawn from experienced Practice Educators, stakeholders and Link Tutors from the social work programme.

**(7) Continuing Professional Education and Learning Framework (CPEL)** describes the minimum arrangements for the ongoing education and learning of social workers in Wales. It is designed to support social workers as they progress and take on new roles and responsibilities, through their career as social work professionals.

**(8) Consolidation Programme** (for all newly qualified social workers). This is the first part of the Continuing Professional Education and Learning Framework. It also forms part of the first 3 years in practice framework, which aims to support social workers as they make transition from graduate to competent practitioner. The Consolidation Programme provides opportunities for newly qualified social workers to consolidate and further develop their knowledge and skills in three core areas;

- a) Applying analysis during assessments to inform interventions
- b) Working collaboratively with people who receive care and support, carers and other professionals
- c) Intervening and applying professional judgement in increasingly complex situations

**(8) Care First Employee Assistance Programme** is a comprehensive set of services designed to help employers provide a balanced and healthy working environment. Employee services include; Counselling, information and advice and health and wellbeing.

**(9) Mindline** is a specially commissioned programme for the Flintshire Social Care Workforce (in-house and independent sector) it offers a range of support services, from team virtual yoga, to individual trauma support services.