

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Safeguarding Sub Committee	27/09/2017
<b>Subject:</b> Social Work Model in the City	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Rachel Green, Service Manager Children's Social Care and Early Help	

### Summary

The ethos and vision of the Children's Social Care and Early Help Service is relationship-based practice.<sup>1</sup> Relationship-based practice builds on psychosocial and psychodynamic approaches to practice. The social worker and service user relationship is recognised to be an important source of information for the worker to understand how best to help, and simultaneously this relationship is the means by which any help or intervention is offered.<sup>2</sup>

This paper explores options to develop this vision and ethos in practice; differing models are reviewed, and learning from other local authorities is drawn upon. The ambition is to fully and clearly embed relationship-based practice throughout the management and social work systems to improve the quality of life and outcomes for children and their families. To realise this ambition, a systemic psychotherapist will be engaged with the service on a half-a-day-a-week basis and a guide to relationship-based practice for the City will be created, so that families know what to expect, and to set out our vision.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

### Background

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<sup>1</sup> As developed by social workers and managers following workshops in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson K., Ruch G., Lymbery M. and Cooper, A. (2011) *Social Work: An introduction to contemporary practice*, Pearson, Harlow.

1. As part of developing a shared vision for Children's Social Care and Early Help, social workers were invited to a workshop to share their ideas on future direction, theories they valued and what they found worked with children and families. The social workers were clear that they valued direct work with children and young people and liked using a range of tools and models. It was also clear that the professional relationship was core to their work.
2. A task and finish group entitled 'Social Work Model in the City' was set up. This comprised a social work representative, the Independent Reviewing Officer/Child Protection Chair, the Service Manager for Quality Assurance, the Service Manager for Children's Social Care and Early Help and the Assistant Director of the People Department.
3. Actions arising from this group include:
  - a. To progress a clear definition of relationship-based practice.
  - b. To identify methods and models available within the overall umbrella of relationship-based practice. To narrow down the methods and models within those available that the City of London will specifically draw upon based on the needs of our service users.
  - c. To review the research base to discover the impact of various models of social work practice and the impact on the service for children and families.
  - d. To review Ofsted reports from a range of local authorities that use differing models.
  - e. To review the evidence gathered above with the social work service, in two formal practice development sessions.

*Progressing a clear definition of relationship-based practice*

4. The following explains that relationship-based practice,
 

".....is closely related to and builds on psychosocial and psychodynamic approaches to practice. Obviously the central characteristic of relationship-based practice is the emphasis it places on the professional relationship as the medium through which the practitioner can engage with and intervene in the complexity of an individual's internal and external worlds – the social worker becomes the agent of change. The social worker and service user relationship is recognised to be an important source of information for the worker to understand how best to help, and simultaneously this relationship is the means by which any help or intervention is offered."

There are several core characteristics of relationship-based practice:

- It recognises that each social work encounter is unique.
- It understands that human behaviour is complex and multifaceted, i.e. people are affected by the conscious and unconscious – dimensions that enrich but simultaneously complicate human relationships.
- It focuses on the inseparable nature of the internal and external worlds of individuals and the importance of integrated – psychosocial – as opposed to polarised responses to social problems.

- It accepts that human behaviour and the professional relationship are an integral component of any professional intervention.
- It places particular emphasis on 'the use of self' and the relationship as the means through which interventions are channelled.
- It cannot primarily be process driven.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Narrowing down the methods and models*

5. Service user feedback via the work undertaken by the City by Action for Children and feedback from the Children in Care Council show the high value placed on a positive relationship with a social worker. Our service is generic, so this affords good opportunities for families to have the same social worker, regardless of category of need.
6. Methods and models used across London and the rest of England were reviewed. This included face-to-face meetings and a review of research and Ofsted reports.
7. Our overarching findings are that made models work better where staff, senior leadership and Members' buy in and there are manageable caseloads, reflective supervision, and long-term vision and planning that enable staff to learn together.
8. The models included in our review included motivational interviewing, Signs of Safety, the Strengthening Practice programme and systemic practice.

#### *Motivational interviewing*

9. The London Borough of Islington, in partnership with University of Bedfordshire and Professor Donald Forrester, is moving into a second phase of what it calls 'Doing what counts and measuring what matters'. This is funded by a central government innovation grant. It made sense to look at this, as it is a comprehensive model with 'relationship-based social work' at its core and is being used by our neighbour. Key elements of the approach delivered via relationship-based interventions and social workers acting as agents of change include:

- motivational interviewing
- collaborative task-centred social work
- evidence-based practice
- measuring what matters – focus on measuring outcomes for children rather than the number of days it takes to complete an assessment.

10. The key findings of the evaluation report on this approach, published in July 2017, show that parents were positive about the approach and practitioner confidence increased, but there was insufficient evidence about improved outcomes for children.<sup>4</sup> The findings show that cultural and procedural change required the commitment and investment of the whole organisation. One

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson K., Ruch G., Lymbery M. and Cooper, A. (2011) *Social Work: An introduction to contemporary practice*, Pearson, Harlow, pp. 7–8.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/islington-doing-what-counts-measuring-what-matters-evaluation>. Accessed 4 September 2017.

challenge, consistent with other models of practice, included the occasional disconnect of relationship-based work and statutory timeframes.

11. The Ofsted grading for the London Borough of Islington was the same as the City of London's: Good with Outstanding in one category.

### *Signs of Safety*

12. Signs of Safety is a self-defined strengths-based approach that focuses on safety planning. It was designed to work with child safeguarding, but has been extended and adapted in some authorities to work with children looked after and fostering services. Professor Eileen Munro champions this work.
13. Local authorities involved in the Signs of Safety Innovations Project with their Ofsted ratings in brackets: Brent (Requires Improvement – RI), Bristol (RI), Leicestershire (RI), Lincolnshire (Good), Norfolk (Inadequate – IA), Suffolk (Good), Tower Hamlets (IA), Wakefield (not yet inspected), West Sussex (RI) and Wokingham (RI).
14. Family feedback has been largely positive, and social workers have found the practice tools simple to use.<sup>5</sup>
15. Feedback from a range of local authorities involved in the above project shows that most practitioners like using Signs of Safety approaches in child safeguarding work, but not in work with children looked after, fostering, children with disabilities and children leaving care. Feedback from our social work staff, including managers, was that Signs of Safety offered some very good practical tools, but that these would work in conjunction with other methods and models.

### *Strengthening Practice programme*

16. Waltham Forest uses the Strengthening Practice programme. Its last Ofsted grading was RI.
17. The benefits of this programme are that it can draw together resources using a range of different methods and it is bespoke. The disadvantages are that it is very expensive and few local authorities use it. An improvement in the service received by children and families is yet to be seen.
18. Feedback from staff was not positive about this programme, and from review it seemed that we could broker the different elements of training ourselves.

### *Systemic practice*

19. The main principles of systemic practice are that problems are located in relationships, not in people; that we as social workers are part of what gets created, and never neutral observers – how this interaction turns out is as much our responsibility as the family's; service users are competent people and experts of their own lives; there are always multiple perspectives as opposed to one truth; the approach is strength and relationship based.

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/signs-safety-england.pdf> Accessed 4 September 2017.

20. Face-to-face meetings were held with two local authorities that have introduced systemic practice into children's services. The purpose of the meetings, along with the associated research- and document-gathering, is to scope the development of systemic practice within the People's Directorate, namely Children's Social Care, while also looking at the potential for other services within the Directorate. Feedback from colleagues elsewhere was positive about the model. Their advice was consistent and clear: caseloads need to be small, buy-in is essential at the outset from the whole organisation and a long-term vision is needed. The two colleagues were clear that staff retention was difficult as, once trained, practitioners moved elsewhere.
21. Some staff members (social workers and managers) are trained within systemic practice and bring these skills and values to their work in the City. A workshop with staff was held with a systemic psychotherapist to introduce the model. All staff were positive about developing practice in this way, particularly given their varied caseloads. The advantage of this approach is that it can be used across all types of cases in our generic social work service.
22. Some of the London local authorities that have adopted systemic practice include Lambeth (IA), Tri-Borough (2 x Outstanding, 1 x Good), Southwark (Good), Harrow (Good), Croydon (IA) and Hackney (Good). Systemic practice within the Tri-borough has been evaluated as part of the Focus on Practice programme<sup>6</sup> to largely positive effect in respect of family and practitioner feedback. Earlier reviews of systemic practice across three anonymised local authorities gave mixed reviews of the model, and found factors such as caseload, quality and frequency of supervision and space for reflective feedback, as well as practical points such as avoiding hot-desking and having printers and IT systems that work, were as important.<sup>7</sup>

## **Current Position**

23. To date, the training and development opportunities offered within the Social Care and Early Help Service have been individually focused. This has been positive, as workers are encouraged to develop their own interests and expertise, and staff feedback is very good in respect of the training offer. This was recorded as a strength in the Ofsted report of July 2016.
24. We need to grow, strengthen and develop as a service. Staff have been fully involved in shaping the direction of our social work service, through a series of workshops. We are clear that we are already operating relationship-based practice and that this ethos directs our work. The ethos can be seen through supervision discussions, audit, and the way in which staff can communicate about their work. The service is clear that a range of methods and tools are needed, to ensure adaptability for differing children and families' needs. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://springconsortium.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Triborough-Focus-on-Practice-Evaluation-Summary-July-16.pdf>. Accessed 4 September 2017.

<sup>7</sup> [http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw\\_11812-8.pdf](http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_11812-8.pdf). Accessed 4 September 2017.

25. Currently, several members of our service, including managers, are trained in Signs of Safety methods and use these tools in supervision and direct work. Our child and family assessments (child safeguarding) have been adapted to work with this model. Several members of our service are trained, at least to an introductory level, in systemic practice.
26. We are now building on this expertise and diversity of practice, to bring together a training programme and a guide for all staff. Following on from the above, we aim to use a range of methods. We will focus on systemic training, while using Signs of Safety tools in child safeguarding work.
27. As such, the service is looking to engage a systemic psychotherapist for one afternoon a week to work with the team. Given the size and level of demand in the City, this is seen as the best fit in providing the additional expertise, knowledge and support to realise our systemic ambitions.
28. An in-house systemic psychotherapist will offer tailored, bespoke support to the City of London. Staff and managers will learn and be supported together. The system will be supported from within, and members and managers at all levels will receive input to ensure strong development in relationship-based practice.
29. In addition, we will continue to use development opportunities afforded by our associate membership of the South East London Teaching Partnership and our partnership with King's College's Making Research Count programme.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

30. This work fits within the remit of the current overarching business plan: to provide modern, efficient, high-quality services to our residents.
31. There is potential for developing our relationship-based social work across the People Department. This would strengthen our Think Family approach, through joint development and potentially save training costs by working together.

## **Conclusion**

32. Relationship-based practice will be further developed by way of a guide to what this means for families and through adopting systemic practice alongside other tools for working with children and their care givers.

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