

Doncaster Children's Service Trust
Social Worker Caseload Policy – April 2021

1. PURPOSE

The Trust want every Doncaster child in every family to receive high quality timely services. This is best achieved by providing high quality and highly supported staff. An essential part of that aim is to provide manageable caseloads.

Research tells us that the priority for social care practitioners when deciding where to practice are:-

- . Manageable Case Loads
- . Effective Managers and Colleagues
- . Good Quality Supervision and CPD
- . Financial Remuneration

Manageable caseloads in Children's Social Care are of key importance for social work practice and interventions that facilitate change within families. This is emphasised in the local government association guide the standard for employers of social workers in England. Standard three of this guidance, which covers safe workloads, states that all employers should:-

- Use a system which has been agreed jointly with social work practitioners and line managers to set transparent safe working levels in each service area and enhances more direct relationship-based practice.
- Ensure each social worker's workload is regularly assessed, with the social worker, to take account of work complexity, individual worker capacity and time needed for supervision and CPD.
- Take contingency action when workload demand exceeds staffing capacity and report regularly to strategic leaders about workload and capacity issues within services.

Clearly, responsibility remains initially with team managers but principally with Service Managers and the Head of Service. Within this there should be an opportunity for staff members to escalate the caseload workload through their line managers who have a responsibility to try and achieve the requirements of this policy.

Any long-standing issues need to be addressed by HOS and made clear to Strategic Business Meeting (SBM) and Executive Management Team (EMT) through daily reporting. Although the Trust is facing challenges on caseload numbers at present, it is the purpose of this policy to set out the Children's Trust and DMBC's aspirations in respect of children's social work caseloads across the service for the future. Caseload average range and maximum numbers will form part of regular weekly monitoring reports to EMT.

2. AIMS

The aims of this policy are to enable social workers and other practitioners to:

- Deliver consistently high quality services;
- Achieve positive outcomes for children and families; and to

Safeguard staff and service users from the risks associated with high caseloads and unallocated cases.

3. STANDARDS

There is no absolute national or local guidance regarding caseloads. Within the Children's Social Care Services it is likely that there will be variations in caseload numbers between teams reflecting the differences in the nature of the work being undertaken and the risk being managed.

It is likely that there will be times when the actual caseloads will be higher than the aspiration set out in this policy. This should only be temporarily and if there are reasons to believe that such a situation would last longer than it would be sustainable, it is a shared responsibility amongst managers to identify such a situation and work with and senior leaders to remedy this critical issue quickly.

In light of this it is important to define some clear standards:

- a. It is the strategic aim to achieve an average caseload not exceeding the range of 18/20 children or young people across Children's Social Care to enable Social Workers and other practitioners to provide a high standard of practice to the children and families they work with.
- b. There will be deviations from the average caseload depending on the range of responsibilities for safeguarding children carried by practitioners in different teams.
- c. For practitioners who do not carry case responsibility for Child in Need, Child Protection or Looked after Children the **average caseload** may be higher.
- d. It is recognised that ASYE Social Workers initially should have approximately 60% of an average caseload in comparison to a post **ASYE qualified Social Worker**. However, their capacity will increase throughout their assessed year as they gain experience. Similarly, caseloads will be set on a pro rata basis for part time staff.
- e. Advanced Practitioners should carry a maximum caseload of 10 which will ensure their practice remains up to date whilst continuing with their other duties.
- f. Consideration should be given to the Trusts Practice standards and Terms and Conditions of Employment, this demonstrates the actual time social care staff are actually available to practice and their need for CPD.

4. CASELOADS FOR SPECIFIC AREAS

- a. **Assessment Service** – Doncaster Children’s Services Trust assessment staff respond to urgent situations and undertake assessments under Section 47 and Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The pace of work is considerable and often varies from one day to the next. Social work interventions occur during these assessment periods and continue following assessment where a Child in Need plan is warranted. Caseloads should not exceed more than 20 children.
- b. **Edge of Care** – This team deal with children deemed to be at the edge of care and is designed to enable assertive and intensive interventions to take place in highly complex family contexts. Caseloads are expected to be in the range of 16-20 children. MST-CAN is a prescribed model and it is important that we retain its effectiveness.
- c. **Child Exploitation** – This team deals with children and young people with various types of vulnerability e.g child sexual exploitation, missing, modern day slavery etc. Social workers are subject matter experts and caseloads based on the new model are expected to be in the range of 16-19 children.
- d. **Area Child Protection Service** – Caseloads in ACPS are expected to be in the range of 18-20 children. The numbers will vary depending on the number of families involved; one family of four children is likely to generate less work than four families of one child. The most intensive pieces of work are likely to be cases going through Court or subject to Child Protection (CP) plans, although some Children in Need (CiN) cases will also make considerable demands on the worker. Social Workers should normally have no more than 5 sets of Care Proceedings and 3 families with children subject to CP plans at any one time.
- e. **Children with Disabilities (CwD)**:-The CwD team carry cases where children are experiencing significant disabilities. These cases are CiN cases, disabled children subject to child protection plans and some who are looked after. Caseloads will be expected to be in the range of 16 – 18.
- f. **Children in Care (CiC)**:- Caseloads in CiC are expected to be in the range of 16-18 children. Sibling groups in the same placement are likely to generate less work, unsettled children who frequently disrupt and children placed over 16-20 miles away are likely to generate more.
- g. **Fostering-Supervising Social Workers** - Caseloads are expected to be in the range of 18-20 fostering households per Supervising Social Worker (SSW) depending on the approval category of the foster carers as short term placements generate more work than long term stable placements. Workers are also involved in the recruitment and assessment of foster carers and will also have 3 fostering assessments to undertake at any one time in addition to their support cases.
- h. **Adoption Team** - Caseloads in the Adoption Team are different to other teams as workers have specific roles and specialisms, which incorporate recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters, family finding for specific children and work relating to support for pre adoption and post adoption cases. Such cases are jointly worked by Social Workers in the ACPS team who work with the birth family and progress the Court process.

The adoption team continue to support birth families after the completion of the court process as well as supporting approved adopters. Adoption service now sits with the South Yorkshire One Adoption and will be developing its own policies and acceptable caseload numbers over time.

- i. **Adoption Support and SGO** – Work can be unpredictable and intensive for children and families within these arrangements. Caseloads should reflect this and not exceed 20.
- j. **Leaving Care** – Working with care leavers can be very variable with an acceptable range of 18-20.
- k. **Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection Co-ordinators** - In the Trust IRO's champion effective planning and assessment for Children in Care, any caseload policy should acknowledge this. Statutory guidance in the IRO handbook state IROs should hold caseloads in the region of 70. CPC's are experts in their field and drive the quality and effectiveness of Risk Management, and Assessment and Planning for children as such caseloads should not exceed 70..

RESPONSIBILITIES

Number	Task	Responsible Officer	Record Required
1	When allocating new cases the line manager must review the current caseload of the practitioner who will be receiving a new case.	Team Manager	Recorded on personal file
2	Where the workload of a worker exceeds the maximum, the reason for allocating a new case has to be clearly recorded in the personal supervision folder.	Team Manager	Recorded on personal supervision file
3	The Team Manager retains the right to allocate cases to social workers even if such allocation exceeds the maximum workload. In these circumstances, the Team Manager must inform the Service Manager and explain the reason for this action to the social worker. A shared responsibility for reprioritising their workload rests with the Team Manager and Social Worker. Such allocation must be time specific and subject to monthly review.	Team Manager and Service Manager	Recorded on personal supervision file
4	If caseloads appear likely to exceed the maximum workload for any longer than a four-week period then this will be escalated as described in section 1 above.	Team Manager & Service Manager with Service Director & EMT	Recorded on personal supervision file
5	An analysis of caseloads should be undertaken at every monthly supervision.	Team Manager	Recorded on personal file

	<p>The analysis includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any issues relating to the extent of the time available to work directly with children and families • Any issues in meeting other demands 		
6	<p>Caseloads of Social Workers by team will be formally reviewed by HOS monthly in the performance SBM monthly meeting. This monitoring will increase to weekly if caseloads exceed these standards.</p> <p>In addition to this there will be weekly scrutiny from EMT as set out above.</p>	Service Director/EMT	<p>Recorded in minutes of EMT</p> <p>Recorded with DMBC as part of contractual framework.</p>

Our aspiration is to establish and maintain this level of caseload allocation across the service, notwithstanding the fact that there may be times when this is challenging. However, this demonstrates the importance that both the Children's Trust and DMBC place on providing children and families with the right quality of service, and giving social care staff the opportunity to deliver it.