Children’s Workforce Development Strategy 2016 - 2017

Children’s Services in Bexley – “It’s the relationships that make change possible”.

Introduction

This document sets out the priority and focus of Bexley’s Children’s Workforce Development Strategy for 2016-2017.

Our Vision

In Bexley we believe that all children, young people and families should reach their potential. We will try to support them as they grow up, to be safe, healthy, and able to make the best use of their skills to secure good employment and therefore make the most of their lives.

We believe that strong families are at the heart of our community. All of our work to support families is driven by their strengths that we build upon to help them to be more resilient and more able to support and protect their children. We will try to help families at the earliest opportunity, especially if there are children living with violence, the mental ill health of a parent or carer, the risk of or actual school exclusion or drug and alcohol abuse by an adult or carer in the household.

As well as integrating Bexley’s vision and values into our organisational culture, we are committed to embedding the Signs of Safety practice model across Children’s Services.

To realise our vision, we want to attract, recruit, develop and retain the most talented, high performing individuals. Bexley’s workforce development strategy is informed by a range of national and local drivers and the key priorities detailed in Bexley’s Corporate Plan 2014-2018, Improvement Plan 2015-2016, Vision and Value statements and Talent Management Programme.
Our Corporate priorities are;

**Priority Two: Living long, fulfilling and independent lives**

**Supporting and protecting Bexley’s most vulnerable residents**

- Through good quality social work practice, prevent harm and protect vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect – where a risk remains or intensifies, act quickly to protect them from further harm
- Fully implement our ‘signs of safety’ work which seeks to strengthen families, assess risk more carefully and reduce the high rate of formal child protection assessment and investigation
- Ensure effective recruitment, retention and training of the best newly qualified and experienced social workers and health care professionals.

- Continue to invest in the social work academy for children’s services to ensure that the ratio of temporary to permanent staff reduces yet further

**Early help to prevent difficulties escalating and requiring more intensive support later**

- Work with parents to who need help with their children, including offering attractive support for education and training.
- Evaluate the Staying Together and Family wellbeing programmes and fully implement to support improved parental mental health, the reduction in family violence and parental substance misuse
- Work with other London boroughs, via the GLA to pilot a new approach that attracts ‘social investors’ to fund Multi Systemic therapy and Functional Family Therapy services to prevent children becoming looked after.
Improvement Plan 2015-2016

- Delivery: Quality of professional practice: frontline and looked after children, Workforce, Inclusion, Prevention
- Behaviour and Culture: Social work values and learning
- Accountability: Leadership, management and partnership

Our vision for children, schools and families in Bexley 2016

1. Most important to us, is the effectiveness of the work that we do and the difference that we make in doing it.

2. In Bexley, we work with the phrase ‘what life and education is like for me’. This helps us to focus on the experiences of children, families, carers and other professionals when we are involved in their lives, education and work.

3. We believe that all children, young people and families should reach their potential. We will try to support them as they grow up, to be safe, healthy, and able to make the best use of their skills to secure good employment and therefore make the most of their lives.

4. Our ambition is that all children and young people live or are educated in good or outstanding environments.

5. We will try to meet the needs of children and young people who have a special educational need or disability as locally as possible. Their education, health and care needs will be regularly reviewed with their best interests at the centre of our thinking.

6. We believe that strong families are at the heart of our community. All of our work to support families is driven by their strengths that we can build upon to help them to be more resilient and more able to support and protect their children.

7. We will try to help families at the earliest opportunity, especially if there are children living with violence, the mental ill health of a parent or carer, the risk of or actual school exclusion or drug and alcohol abuse by an adult or carer in the household.

8. In our work with families and alongside our partners, we will work to reduce harm to children and young people and we will protect them from abuse and neglect. If the risk remains or intensifies, we will act quickly to protect them from further harm.
9. Where it is not possible for children and young people to remain living with their families, we will provide good permanent alternatives that improve their life chances. They will not be disadvantaged by becoming looked after children.

10. The feedback that we receive from children, young people, families, carers and colleagues who we are working with, helps us to improve and to learn. We will ask people about their experiences of our work with them and will listen and learn from the mistakes we make.

11. We believe it is important to provide good information and to use clear and simple processes that everyone can understand and to use those consistently. We want those processes to support the help we provide to children, young people, families, carers and learners.

12. We want to offer services that are high quality and efficient for everyone. We aspire to manage our performance carefully, making sure that we understand our business and hold ourselves properly to account for the quality and delivery of care, education, help and support.

13. Our leaders and managers are expected to provide good support to staff and to each other and to respond quickly and effectively to improve things when they are going wrong.

**London Borough of Bexley: Our professional values when we are working with children, young people, families and carers.**

1. We believe that good practice only happens through the relationships we have with the children, young people and adults we are trying to help. We will always be careful to balance the authority we have with empathy and respect for everyone with whom we work.

2. We will always speak plainly and make sure the children, young people and families we are working with, understand what we are saying, what we are doing and why we are doing it, explaining the judgements we make and the actions we take.

3. We will always ask and then listen carefully to children and young people when they share what is happening in their lives, what they are worried about and what they want to happen. Their experiences, past, present and future will always be at the centre of our thinking. We will take every opportunity to help them become confident, independent and resilient individuals.

4. We will be thoughtful and analytical with all the information we have when we are assessing what children and young people need to keep them safe. Our assessments will show clear reasoning and will reach a clear conclusion that everyone can
understand.

5. We believe every family has strengths, which we will notice when we are working together. We will help people to identify solutions to their difficulties, making the best use of the good and safe things that already exist in their own network of family, friends and community.

6. We believe that we have a shared responsibility to help families to change so that children and young people live safely with them. We will work with families to make a clear plan about what needs to change and we will describe clearly the help we can offer. Our plans will also clearly explain what will happen if things do not change.

7. When we make professional judgements about ‘best next steps’ to help a family, we will think together as colleagues and managers, making sure we take time and care to agree decisions that are in the best interests of the children and young people.

8. We believe that the help we offer to families is more effective when we work closely with other professionals, provided we have consent to do so and/or it is in the best interests of the children involved.

9. We will keep clear records about our work with children, young people, families and carers which we will share with them when it is in their best interests. We will keep a detailed history for those children and young people who we look after, so that they can understand their lives, their own stories and the decisions that have been made to keep them safe and happy.

10. We will be reliable and interested in the quality and effectiveness of our work. We will make sure everyone understands what we are doing, why we are doing it and the plans we are making. We will always ask for feedback, and we will learn how to improve what we do and how we do it.

The Children’s Workforce - Bexley

Children’s Services Teams

Front Door - MASH

Bexley Children’s Social Care (CSC) has a ‘Front Door’ service which is the first point of contact for any individual or agency that requires information, advice and safeguarding services for children and/or who may be worried about the welfare of a child. The ‘Front Door’ records all the incoming contacts for the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Where a contact is received, the MASH conduct screening and information checks through each of its multi-agency partners and decides how to best help. They provide advice, guidance, signposting and make decisions about whether ‘threshold’ is met to refer the child and family to one of the CSC Assessment Teams, or ‘divert’ the child and family to early help Family Wellbeing Service, within 24 hours. The MASH is a truly multi-agency team.
containing social workers, Women’s Aid, the Police, Education, Health, YOT and Probation professionals, who work together to share information.

**Early Help Family Wellbeing Service.**
This team works with families identified as likely to benefit from support to prevent entry into statutory services and to support those families who no longer need a specialist level of help from statutory service. The service is available to children where there is parental mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic violence and/or a child is at risk of permanent exclusion.

There are 3 locality teams of family key workers who work with families using a ‘Signs of Wellbeing’ approach. This team also works closely with partners in the voluntary sector to provide support and advice to families.

**Referral and Assessment Teams**
Bexley has 3 assessment teams, who undertake child and family assessments (within 45 days) and child protection enquiries, working closely with the local police and health agencies. Once the assessment has identified the issues and the child’s level of need, Children’s Social Care (CSC) may recommended the family are signposted to support provided to another services, they may be transferred to our early help family wellbeing service or transferred to a social worker in CSC to provide an ongoing service in one of the Family Support & Child Protection locality teams. Bexley has adopted the ‘Signs of Safety’ approach across all its teams.

**Family Support & Child Protection Locality Teams**
Bexley has 4 locality teams, if the assessment team recommends the child would benefit from help and support from a social worker, the family are transferred through to the relevant locality team.

Localities are organised into teams covering different areas of Bexley, in order to develop good working partnerships with colleagues in other key agencies. Social workers in the FS&CP locality teams work with children in need, children subject to child protection plans and where there is insufficient safety in the family, these teams may initiate Public Law Outline and court proceedings. The work of the locality social workers is supported by the Child Protection Conference Chairs who work collaboratively with the teams to ensure that child protection plans are keeping children safe and promoting good outcomes.

**Staying Together Team**
This is a small team that has a specific role to provide high intensity help when families are in crisis and children over 10 years old are on the edge of coming into care. This team works alongside the allocated social worker to provide additional help to families to help keep children and young people at home safely.

**Children with Disabilities SEND Team**
The Disabled Children Service conducts its own specialist assessments for those children referred directly to that team via the MASH. If a child meets the local eligibility criteria, the family will be offered support services either directly through the Local Authority e.g. through short breaks respite care, and/or through ‘direct payments’ for some or all care and adaptations required for the child. Our DCS works closely with health professionals to work holistically to undertake SEND assessments.
Looked After Children and Permanence Service

The newly redesigned service has responsibility for all looked after children, care proceedings and young people we look after who we are helping prepare to leave our care or move into our dedicated Leaving Care Service. There are three Looked After Children Teams and a Leaving Care Team. All Looked After Children have an allocated social worker who is responsible for ensuring that their placement (foster carers, Residential Providers, Semi-Independent Providers or Supported Lodging Providers) is meeting their needs in terms of Care provided, contact with family, education & health needs. Once a Looked After child turns 17.5 they will also be allocated a Personal Advisor from the Leaving Care Team. Once the young person turns 18 if they meet the criteria for a Leaving Care Service they will transfer into the Leaving Care Team until they are 21 or 25 if they remain in Higher education. Our Personal Advisors support young people with their tenancy and living independently. This includes support with higher education, work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, budgeting, benefits & health care needs.

Placements Team

Placements are part of the wider specialist services including fostering and adoption. The placements team identifies and co-ordinates arrangements for placements including ‘in house’ fostering, independent fostering agencies and residential care. The team works alongside the allocated social worker and manager and makes every effort to match the child to a suitable carer from within the authority. The team includes a contract officer who provides excellent oversight to contract management and commissioning.

Fostering Team

This team is responsible for recruiting, assessing, supporting, regulating and training Bexley foster carers. The Local Authority maintains a pool of ‘in house’ foster carers, some of whom reside in Bexley others live elsewhere. When members of the public express an interest in fostering, the Fostering Team social worker undertakes an initial screening, then potential candidates undergo a thorough 16 week approval process where the social worker undertakes and presents an assessment to a fostering panel. The panel recommends to the agency decision maker (ADM) whether or not to approve the applicant/s. If approved, the foster carer is allocated a ‘supervising social worker’ in the Fostering Team who provides support and training as they have looked after children placed in their care.

Adoption Team

The Adoption Team recruits and undertakes assessments of prospective adopters. The adoption social worker makes a recommendation to an independent adoption panel, which recommends to the ADM whether or not the applicant is suitable for adopting any child. The Adoption Team also trains and the Local Authority is required to continue to provide support to adopters in post adoptive arrangements as necessary.

The Virtual School

We have a responsibility to ensure the children we look after have their health and education promoted to reach their full potential. The Virtual School team is in
place to ensure all looked after children in Bexley have a place in appropriate educational provision and are supported to through a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and use of the Pupil Premium Plus. The Virtual School monitors academic attainment, attendance, exclusions, supports children by providing additional support and assists in securing good school placements for our looked after children.

Family Assessment Service
The Think Family Service is a Family Centre located in the north of the borough, comprised of a team manager, senior social workers, social workers, social work assistants, a contact coordinator and administrative support. The service provides parenting assessments, a range of parenting groups, it co-ordinates that family group conferences and provides a supervised contact service.

Independent Reviewing and Conference Team
The Safeguarding Service comprises of a Team Manager, 5 Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)and 3.5 Child Protection Conference chairs. Staff in these roles are qualified, experienced social workers with managerial experience.

Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for chairing looked after children’s review meetings and monitor their care plans to ensure their needs are being met. Child Protection Conference chairs are responsible for chairing Child Protection Conferences. Both the IRO and CP Chair teams offer consultation to social workers and will chair complex meetings to provide an independent perspective.

Workforce Development & The Academy
This team is part of the Professional Standard and Quality Assurance Service. It plays a vital role in providing quality assurance and robust challenge to ensure that high standards are achieved and proper procedures are followed. The team is responsible for developing the skills of staff and driving continuous improvement in the quality of professional practice. The Head of Professional Standards and Quality Assurance is the Council’s lead principal social worker and the overall manager of The Academy.

Looked After Children Health Nurse & CAMHS Looked After Children Team
We have a looked after children nurse in the service to ensure all looked after children have regular annual health and dental assessments and access to health services to promote their health and wellbeing. There is also a specialist CAMHS service to ensure those who are most vulnerable receive prompt and appropriate support for their mental health needs.

The Youth Leadership Board/Children in Care Council
Bexley has a youth leadership board made up of a young director who chairs the Children in Care Council, a deputy and three heads of service. The leadership board representatives attend meetings in the council with senior leaders and councillors. Through this, they are able to represent the views of children and young people receiving help from Bexley Children’s Services and influence service delivery. The young director is also the chair of the Children in Care Council.
The Children in Care Council is a forum for enabling looked after children to feedback their experiences and influence services. Bexley has a Practice Development Officer who works with the Children in Care Council and Looked After Children to assist Looked After Children to become involved in a range of activities aimed at improving services and promoting opportunities for Looked After Children to develop skills and knowledge. The Bexley Children in Care Council are actively involved in recruiting, inducting and training foster carers and social workers.

**Bexley Children’s Service Practice Model**

Bexley uses Signs of Safety as the practice model for working with children and their families. This is a strengths-based approach to working in partnership with families.

One of the biggest problems in child protection work, identified in many child death inquiries, is that participants in the child protection process are effectively speaking a different language. (Munro, 2002; Reder, Duncan and Gray, 1993.) The Signs of Safety framework is designed to create a shared focus and understanding among all stakeholders in child protection cases, both professional and family. It is designed to help everyone think their way into and through the case from the ‘biggest’ person (such as a Director, judge or child psychiatrist) to the ‘smallest’ person (the child).

The Signs of Safety approach provides principles, disciplines and fit-for-purpose tools that equip practitioners and supervisors to build observable everyday safety for children, together with parents and their naturally connected networks. Alongside this, because the Signs of Safety focuses closely on what is actually decided and done in practice, it creates a context where organisational leadership can access practice and decision-making itself, and thus more closely analyse and shape the organisational arrangements that strengthen or inhibit good practice. In this way, Signs of Safety grows whole-of-agency acuity to the realities of frontline practice, which better enables the organisation and its leaders to improve safety and outcomes for vulnerable children.
Working in partnership involves being able to develop positive and constructive working relationships with parents, children and other professionals. When using the Signs of Safety approach, the quality of the relationship between the social worker and the family is based on clear and honest communication and a focus on strengths as well as what needs to change. The focus of social work practice at Bexley is on working in a relationship based way, where social workers have the time and space to help children and families and effect change.

The welfare and safety of the child are paramount. Signs of Safety promotes the use of child-friendly and age appropriate tools for direct work so that the child’s wishes and feelings are part of the safety planning with the family. Through the use of direct work and play, the child is able to have a meaningful role in any safety plan and the child’s voice is clearly heard in all aspects of the help being provided to the family.

Signs of Safety is a constantly evolving practice model that has been used around the world for over twenty years. The wisdom and experience of other organisations using the model suggests it takes 3-5 years to embed into day to day practice as it requires changes, not just to practice, but systems, processes, and structures that support that practice. There needs to be deliberate effort to access continuous feedback from staff and families about how Signs of Safety is working. Sharing successes through appreciative inquiries in workplaces is fundamental and must be driven by the key leaders.

To support this whole system change, all practitioners across Children’s Social Care (and eventually all of Children’s Services) will complete a 2-day introductory training. It is envisaged that managers and leaders (from team manager to deputy director) will complete the 5-day intensive course. Practice is supported with additional workshops, 1:1 support, group supervision, and by a practice leaders group chaired by a senior leader. Forms on LiquidLogic are being adapted to make them fit for SoS practice and work is ongoing to review procedures, processes, and panels to ensure we are working from a strengths based and risk aware approach across all levels of the service and with our partner organisations.

(Signs of Safety Comprehensive Briefing Paper; Turnell, A and Murphy, T; 2014)

Knowledge and Skills Statements

The Government is committed to reforming social care and social work practice to deliver better support and better outcomes for children. Central to success will be improving the capability and professional confidence of social workers. The Government’s vision is that the reforms will ensure better qualified and trained social workers, operating with consistently high levels of knowledge and skills, able to sustain and develop their careers through clear pathways without losing focus on the front line.

The Knowledge and Skills for Child and Family Social Work form part of the social work reform and were written by the Chief Social Worker Isabelle Trowler to reflect the essential capabilities of Child Family Social Workers, Practice Leaders...
and Practice Supervisors. For now, the overarching framework remains the Professional Capabilities Framework but the Knowledge and Skills Statements provide more detail on what a child and family social worker should know and be able to do. Bexley is committed to embedding the Knowledge and Skills Statements into practice and developing a whole system approach whereby the statements become a ‘golden thread’ throughout Children’s Services from recruitment to career progression pathways.

There are 10 statements in total. A child and family social worker should be able to do the following:

1. Relationships and effective direct work
2. Communication
3. Child development
4. Adult mental ill health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, physical ill health and disability
5. Abuse and neglect of children
6. Child and family assessment
7. Analysis, decision making, planning and review
8. The law and the family and youth justice systems
9. The role of supervision
10. Organisational context

**Workforce Development**

High quality social work requires investment in people. Leaders and managers must look after the people who look after children (Ofsted 2016). If child and family social workers are to develop their capabilities throughout their careers, it is essential that they engage productively in continuing professional development (Munro 2011). We believe that all staff should have the opportunity to grow, develop and progress throughout their career; Managers and Leaders within Bexley are critical to this process and will use the Performance Conversation and half yearly appraisal to identify and support areas for professional development. At Bexley we offer a comprehensive range of training opportunities and professional development through appraisal, coaching and mentoring and our talent management programme. We are committed to a ‘whole system’ approach through drawing on the expertise of colleagues within the organisation as well as commissioning bespoke learning opportunities from experts in the field. In Bexley we are passionate about outstanding social work practice and are committed to investing in the development of all our staff, to ensure that as an organisation we can meet the changing demands upon us, both now, and in the future. In Bexley we want our managers to be inspirational and influential. To achieve this Bexley has ambitious plans for developing its workforce, underpinned by a robust framework to support career progression for all social workers from those who are newly qualified right through to managers.

The Professional Standards and Quality Assurance Team will;

- Undertake a training needs analysis to ensure that the learning and development offer is fit for purpose.
- Ensure that we respond to learning needs identified through Bexley’s Improvement Plan, performance data, practice audits, practitioner/customer feedback and complaints, Serious Case Reviews and Serious Incidents.
• Induction day for all new Children’s Services employees.
• All Children’s Service staff will have appraisals and performance conversations in line with organisational policy.
• Provide Signs of Safety training to all frontline staff, including the Practice Leaders Programme for managers.
• Continue to develop strong partnerships and good collaborative relationships with Higher Education Institutes.
• Will promote practice-based career pathways so we will continue to fund the Practice Educator Programme for practitioners wanting to enhance their role.
• Provide legal and court skills training in partnership with Legal Services.
• Provide twice yearly staff conferences with external speakers.
• Continue to provide coaching and mentoring opportunities.
• Make effective use of the resources from Community Care Inform, Making Research Count & Research in Practice to develop expertise and specialist knowledge.
• Make effective use of the learning & development ‘Everyday Learning’ offer from Organisational Development.
• Commission bespoke learning opportunities to complement the internal offer, such as Motivational Interviewing.
• Consider formal Higher Education Institutes accredited Continuous Professional Development courses such as MA programmes with leading Universities as part of the talent management programme.
• Deliver learning and development opportunities in new creative ways to enhance learning ‘on the job’.
• Develop the Talent Management Programme to support career progression for all social workers from those who are newly qualified right through to managers. This will include an aspiring talent manager programme.
• Develop a Bexley Managers Institute that will incorporate the firstline leadership programme and associated research project into leadership in social work and bespoke leadership training as well as action learning focused on leadership within Children’s Services.
• Practice Development Officers will be assigned lead roles to support and complement managers in practice improvement activity across the service such as Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing Children, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and implementing the Knowledge Skills Statements and supporting the accreditation process.
• Establish quarterly career progression panels for practitioners moving from level 2 to 3.
• Establish a ‘Practitioner Perspective & Good Practice’ panel to hear the views and experiences of front line practitioners and report to the Deputy Director. This will complement the Director’s Keeping in Touch meetings.
• Consider employment based routes into social work and explore ‘grow your own’ models for
exceptional Social Work Assistants who want to become qualified social workers.

- Develop a ‘What Works’ resource library.

Recruitment

A significant problem nationally is the recruitment and retention of statutory social work staff within Children’s Services. Bexley isn’t exempt from such problems and we are developing a more robust response to understanding the needs of the workforce, including the turnover of social workers. The data will assist us in developing our workforce and succession plans. Going forward our priority will be to focus on the profile of leavers using the Management Information or SIBS data which will then inform the design of a targeted recruitment campaign to fill critical posts. This also needs to include the gaps created by social workers being promoted within the service. The Workforce Strategy Group will;

- Develop a better understanding of the turnover of social workers including identifying why social workers leave Bexley.
- Promote Bexley’s branding and offer to social workers, including key messages from the staff Health Check.
- Develop job profiles aligned to The Knowledge and Skills Statements.
- Develop a rolling recruitment programme for social workers, targeting critical posts.
- Establish a monthly recruitment/interview panel to quickly respond to social work applications.
- Evaluate the number of NQSW appointed to the Academy and the Academy model as an on-going business case.

Retention

- Benchmark Bexley’s employer standards against The Social Work Standards for Employers.
- Develop career progression pathways aligned to The Knowledge and Skills Statements and robust succession plans for all employees.
- Continue to undertake the Health Checks twice yearly to identify issues and areas for development.
- Develop robust appraisals and talent management processes to retain the most talented, high performing individuals.
- Ensure staff are aware of the Employee Assistance Programme and the support available such a counselling.