

Gateshead children's social Work caseload guidance document

Foreword

We are committed to ensuring that our social workers are well supported in their roles, are encouraged to contribute to continuous improvement across the service and are recognised by ourselves for the invaluable contribution they make to families across Gateshead.”

Councillor Gary Haley, Cabinet Member (Children and Young People)

Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director (Children, Adults and Families)

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1. PURPOSE

Manageable caseloads in Children's Social Care are of key importance for social work practice and interventions that enable change with families.

This imperative is emphasised in the Employer Standards (2010 which were refreshed in 2014¹) which states:

- Children's Social Care as an employer needs to have a transparent system in place to allocate work, to assess and review the workload of each social worker;
- Caseload data is used to develop contingency plans for resolving situations where workload demands exceed the staffing capacity and to inform workforce planning;

The purpose of this policy is to set out the Council's aspirations in respect of children's social work caseloads across the service in light of the Employer Standards.

Standard 3 of the employer standards reminds us that:

As a social worker you should expect to:

- Have benchmarks for safe workloads set for your area;
- Have your workload regularly reviewed taking account of complexity, your individual capacity, experience with enough opportunities for reflective supervision and professional development.
- Have your work allocated transparently and with prior discussion;

¹ Available at <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-full-document-st-442.pdf>

- Have your professional judgement about workload capacity issues listened to, taken seriously and respected;
- Have your workload adjusted where demand exceeds staffing capacity.

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
- Prevent work overload and 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 Work services, it is likely that there will be variations in caseloads between teams, reflecting the differences in the nature of the work being undertaken, and the risks being managed.

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

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

1. **It is the aim to achieve an average caseload not exceeding 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 children and families they work with.
2. There may be deviations from the average caseload depending on the range of responsibilities for safeguarding children carried by practitioners in different teams.
3. The number of cases on the caseload of a social worker is not in itself a reliable measure of the workload activity nor is it an accurate measure of the social worker's capacity to take on new work or indeed their ability to safely deal with the current workload.
4. For practitioners who do not carry case responsibility for Child in Need, Child Protection or Looked After Children the **average caseload** may be higher;
5. It is been recognised that ASYE social workers will be supported to build up their caseload gradually, in line with their professional development. It is therefore recognised that their average caseload will be smaller than a post **ASYE qualified social worker**. However, their capacity increases throughout their assessed year as they gain experience.
6. Caseloads will be set on a pro rata basis for part time staff
7. Managers should not carry a caseload.

4. CASELOADS FOR SPECIFIC SERVICE AREAS

- 1. Assessment and Intervention(A&I)**-In Gateshead A&I social workers 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 impossible to predict 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 in A&I should not exceed more than **16-20 children /8-10 families per social worker**.
- 2. Edge of Care/CCiN**- This team deal with children deemed at the edge of care and is designed to enable assertive and intensive interventions to take place in highly complex family contexts. Caseloads should not exceed **16 children/8 families per social worker**.
- 3. Social workers in Schools Team (SWiS)**-Following a successful bid to the DFE Gateshead secured their place in the 1 year 'scale-up' for the 'social workers in schools' programme (SWiS).
SWiS embeds social workers in 6 secondary schools in Gateshead; with the overall aim of keeping children at home safely and reducing the need for social work involvement. The role is also to work with schools to help provide a better understanding of the social work role and explore a contextual way of working with children/families. SWiS workers hold statutory cases which come from their allocated school via the Initial Response Team (IRT). They will also offer support, advice and smaller scale interventions in non-statutory matters, thus allowing for opportunities to work collaboratively with pastoral and designated safeguarding staff within the schools. Caseloads for SWiS are capped at **between 10 and 16 individual children per social worker**.
- 4. Safeguarding and Care Planning- (SGCP)**– hold cases transferred from A&I where the circumstances for the child have required escalation to a child protection plan, legal intervention or for the child to become looked after. The service also hold some Child in Need plans following de-escalation. Caseloads in SGCP are expected to be in the range of **16-20 children /8-10 families per social worker**. The most intensive pieces of work are likely to be cases going through Court or subject to new CP Plans, particularly if the family is not settled and stable.
- 5. Children with disability team (CWD)** The CWD 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 **18-25 children/9-12 families per social worker**.
- 6. Looked after children (LAC)** – Cases held by the LAC service have typically transferred from SGCP once the child's circumstances have become settled through Care proceeding and the plan is for long term local authority care. Caseloads in LAC are expected to be in the range of **16-20 children per social worker**. Children in settled placements are likely to generate less work, but children who are unsettled in placement are likely to generate more. The proximity of the placement to the borough may also involve additional travel time.
- 7. Fostering-Supervising Social workers** – Caseloads are expected to be in the region of **18 - 20 fostering households per worker** depending on the approval category of the foster carers as

short-term placements generate more work than long term stable placements. Social workers are also involved in the recruitment and will also have several fostering assessments to undertake at any given time.

8. **Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)** -. In Gateshead IRO's are also Reviewing Officers for Child Protection conferences. Regulatory arrangements state IROs should hold caseloads of between **50 to 70 children**. As such our strategic aim is that an IRO caseload should not exceed 70 in total of both child protection and looked after children. Some cases require more oversight at different times e.g. where court proceedings are ongoing or there are frequent changes to the care plan/child protection plan. Practice Supervisors hold half a caseload alongside supervisory duties. The LADO also holds approximately 30 child protection and children in care. The IRO for Gateshead Foster carers reviews all the registered foster carers for Gateshead on an annual basis. This caseload remains fairly static between 190 and 200 but can fluctuate slightly depending on the recruitment and retention of our foster carers

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

No.	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.	Senior Practice Supervisor/practice Supervisor	Recorded on personal file
2.	Where the workload of a worker exceeds the maximum the reason for allocating a new case must be clearly recorded in the personal supervision folder.	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor	Recorded on personal supervision file
3.	The Senior Practice supervisor retains the right to allocate cases to social workers even if such allocation exceeds the maximum workload. In these circumstances the Senior Practice supervisor or Practice supervisor 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 Senior practice supervisor or Practice supervisor and Social worker. Such allocation must be time specified and subject to monthly review.	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor and Service Manager	Recorded on personal supervision file
4.	If the caseload continues to exceed the maximum workload for any longer than a 3 month period, and it is the assessment of the Senior Practice supervisor or practice supervisor that the work is likely to be on going, Senior Managers must be informed who will attempt to rectify the situation.	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor & Service Manager with Deputy Strategic Director	Recorded on personal supervision file

5.	<p>An analysis of Caseloads should be undertaken at every monthly supervision. This analysis includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any issues relating to the extent of time available to work directly with children and families; • Any issues in meeting other demands. 	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor	Recorded on personal file
6.	Service managers with the Deputy Strategic Director will consider caseloads across the 3 service areas each week (typically each Friday afternoon)	Deputy Strategic Director and Service Managers	Actions from the meeting will be completed by business support
7.	Average Caseloads of Social workers by team will be reviewed by GMT quarterly.	Deputy Strategic Director /GMT	Recorded in minutes of GMT

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