

## **Gateshead Children's Social Work Caseload Policy**

### **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 2014<sup>1</sup>) 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;
- A caseload weighting system will need to be developed to provide an objective measure of caseloads across the service.

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 sufficient opportunities for reflective supervision and professional development.
- Have your work allocated transparently and with prior discussion;
- 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:

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

- 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 policy. This should only be the case 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 senior leaders to remedy this critical issue quickly.

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

1. **It is the strategic aim to achieve an average caseload not exceeding 18 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 Workers capacity to take on new work or indeed their ability to safely deal with the current workload. The Caseload will therefore also be analysed through the application of a Caseload Weighting System (CWS) which takes into account activity, experience, FTE and other factors which may impact on an individual's ability to hold cases. The use of the CWS is intended to provide a more sophisticated measure of the caseloads held by the Social Workers on a minimum monthly basis.
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 initially should have approximately 80% of an average caseload in comparison to a post **ASYE qualified Social Worker**. However, their capacity increases throughout their assessed year as they gain experience. Similarly caseloads will be set on a pro rata basis for part time staff
6. Where a team holds a caseload higher than the overall average this will need to be discussed and agreed by GMT;
7. Senior Practice Supervisors and Practice Supervisors and their managers should not carry a caseload.

#### **4. CASELOADS FOR SPECIFIC SERVICE AREAS**

1. **Assessment and Intervention(A&I)**-In Gateshead A&I 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 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 16-18 children.
2. **Edge of Care**- 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.
3. **Safeguarding and Care Planning- (SGCP)**–Caseloads in SGCP are expected to be in the range of 16-18 children. The numbers will vary depending on the numbers of families involved – one family of 4 children is likely to generate less work than 4 families of one child. The most intensive pieces of work are likely to be cases going through Court or subject to CP Plans, although some CiN cases will also make demands on the worker. Social Workers should normally have no more than 3 sets of Care Proceedings and 3 families with children subject to CP plans and anyone time.
4. **Children with Disabilities (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.
5. **Looked after children (LAC)** – Caseloads in LAC 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 20 miles away are likely to generate more.

6. **Fostering-Supervising Social Workers** – Caseloads are expected to be in the region of 18 - 20 fostering households per 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 will also have 3 fostering assessments to undertake at any one time on top of their support cases
7. **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 SGCP 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. Caseloads should be up to 20 support cases, 15 family finding cases and 4-6 assessments.
8. **Leaving Care** – Work is likely to be more intensive for the 16/17 age groups. Caseloads of children under the age of 18 should be in the region of 16-18 and those over 18 would be expected to be 20-25.
9. **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 cases. As such our strategic aim is that an IRO caseload should not exceed 70 in total.

## **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 has to 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	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice	Recorded on personal

	<p>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.</p>	Supervisor and Service Manager	supervision file
4.	<p>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.</p>	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor & Service Manager with Service Director	Recorded on personal supervision file
5.	<p>An analysis of Caseloads should be undertaken at every monthly supervision.</p> <p>This analysis includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any issues relating to the extent of time available to work directly with children and families;</li> <li>• Any issues in meeting other demands.</li> </ul>	Senior Practice Supervisor/Practice Supervisor	Recorded on personal file
6.	<p>Average Caseloads of Social Workers by team will be reviewed by GMT quarterly.</p>	Service Director/GMT	Recorded in minutes of GMT