

TITLE	Compass Team Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Compass team was designed to support the overall vision of Wokingham Children's services: -

'A Borough where all our children and young people feel and are safe, are well cared for, emotionally healthy, resilient, and achieve their potential, regardless of background'

As part of the Children's Services improvement journey to we have reviewed the way we support children at the edge of care and at risk of family breakdown as well as those in care to improve their stability and permanence.

RECOMMENDATION

To note the current position and progress of the Compass team

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Compass team was developed in response to identified gaps in our service provision. The gaps were identified through case reviews, audits and consultation with children, families, and partner agencies.

The goal of this new team is to enrich our offer, provide additional and different capacity and develop new ways of working to support social work teams to deliver and sustain positive outcomes, that supports permanence for children.

The work of the team focuses on the following areas:

- To enable children to remain at home or in their connected networks when safe to do so.
- Those children who are in placements to remain in there for as long as appropriate and without any unplanned moves.
- Where children could return home or to their connected networks, they can safely leave care and build their relationships and resilience in their local communities.

Background

As a learning organisation we reviewed the way that we worked with children who are on the 'Edge of Care', we explored national models of best practice in these areas and considered relevant research. We also reflected with staff, our partners as well as some children and families as to what the right solutions could be for Wokingham.

We wanted to challenge ourselves and others to ensure we are making the best decisions and plans for children. We believe that we should explore all options before a child leaves their family or connected network as maintaining relationships supports children's resilience.

The Compass Team commenced work in June 2020. The team consists of a team manager and three child and family workers. They have a wide range of expertise including Prison Service, Probation Service, children's residential homes, and working with males displaying sexually harmful behaviours. We have a Psychologist with a specialism in developmental trauma and child development.

Since being in post the team have completed training relating to case formulation, trauma informed practice and are currently completing an accredited systemic practice training.

Case formulation offers the team of professionals around a family to consider developmental trauma, and to consider a specific 'helping question' to explain the current presentation and produce a work plan.

Trauma informed practice is a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and that creates opportunities for children and families to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

Systemic practice enables professionals to look holistically at children and families conditions and environmental factors to gain a better understanding of why they face issues or hardships and how best to support the family.

The aims of the Compass Team

- Presenting alternatives to children coming into care
- Improve quality of practice in supporting children to remain at home or in connected networks safely
- Improving relationships within families and networks to increase resilience in the family to avoid the need for future professional intervention
- Better management of costs and efficiency of placements
- Reduce the number of children in care through reunification where appropriate
- Increase placement stability (i.e. prevent unnecessary moves between placements & from lower to higher placements)
- Contribute to processes which reduce drift in decision making for care planning and permanence for children
- Increase successful transition to independence

Principles of the Compass Team

- Must be flexible and offer a service outside of working hours.
- Intensive, assertive and responsive to build trusted relationships.
- To limit and plan the number of professionals in a child and families life; one worker to be the key contact for the duration of the young person's journey. Everyone's roles and responsibilities to be clear.
- Outcomes focused –plan for the future, not just what we are worried about now, what will be in this child's best interests longer term
- Signs of safety with systemic practice; a relationship based and trauma informed approach.
- Work will be consistent, collaborative, in partnership with children, families and other agencies.
- Good assessments and plans based on shared information regarding the past to understand the current situation and needs.
- Working with children and families to seek solutions, where progress is regularly reviewed.
- Creative solutions encouraged and supported
- Understanding the wider contexts for a child and family to reduce the risks of extra-familial harm
- Staff are supported to work with complexity and risk

The offer of the Compass Team

- The team will work primarily with 10 – 18 year olds.
- Provide intense 1-1 support to build resilience and trust (hold small caseloads of 4-7 to support intensive working).
- Respond to crisis and work with the strengths in the family to avoid care
- Develop a clear model of practice starting with sharing of information and a case formulation so that behaviours can be understood, and a clear plan developed.
- Work as part of the team around the child/family with key professionals and the social worker as the lead professional
- Delivering direct interventions and support to others in working systemically, utilising solution focused approach, motivational interviewing, restorative practice, in line with Wokingham's Practice Model
- Develop relationships and provide support for family networks, carers and residential staff.

Who the team will work with:

- Children considered at the edge of care or at risk of family breakdown that are mainly aged 10 - 18
- Children where their current arrangement is at risk of breakdown
- Children in emergency placements
- Children in high-cost placements
- Children who are the subject of placement stability meetings
- Children who have had accelerated entry to care

Overview of current work held within the team

- There are 16 children/young people and their families currently open to the Compass Team.
- 8 children/young people are in the care of the Local Authority, including children subject to a Care Order at home, and in the care of wider family members.
- Some children/young people are in the care of parent/s, where there is a risk of this breaking down.
- Presenting concerns at the point of referral include risk of family breakdown, placement instability, child to parent violence, and concerns associated with child criminal exploitation.
- Work with adolescents who are looked after returning to the care of their families.

Outcomes/progress

- In all but one case so far, family breakdown has been averted and there has been a noticeable improvement in relationships
- Families who have finished working with members of the Compass Team have noted improvements in their ability to communicate with their child/ren, and an improvement in the behaviour and confidence of the child/young person. They have also noted improvements in relation to their own parenting and feeling that they have a range of strategies to try when they run into 'bumps along the road'.
- Professionals have noted that the intensive nature of the work has been particularly effective in a number of cases, with young people citing the fear
- of having regularly changing Social Workers as a reason for not engaging with them fully.
- It has also been noted families who are working with The Compass Team have been able to develop more positive working relationships with the Social Work team; there have been a number of cases where this has been a marked improvement and has led to greater understanding of the family's difficulties and their reasons for struggling to engage historically.
- Children and young people report that they like having an allocated worker and that they value being able to do activities and explore their interests.
- They have also commented that they feel listened to and that it feels to them that their views are presented in a way which is balanced and is helpful.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions there has also been a limit to the face to face contact that the team can have with referring teams. However, the Team Manager has attended team meetings with Here 4U, the long-term teams, the front door teams and the independent reviewing officers. The Compass Team are also represented at Transfer Meetings and the Exploitation and Missing Risk Assessment Conference (EMRAC) to ensure that any potential cases can be identified as early as possible.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

This report is to provide an update only

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

N/A

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