



# **Redcar & Cleveland**

## **Children & Families Service**

### **Social Work Caseload Management Guidance**

#### **2020-2022**

Directorate of Children & Families  
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INTERNAL USE ONLY



**Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.**

**Document Control**

**Change Record**

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## Introduction:

Since Monroe's Review of Child Protection was published there has been continued debate in relation to social work caseloads and the different ways of managing them. The report 'Building a Safe, Confident Future' highlighted that the skills and awareness of line managers are pivotal to caseload management.

Some of the research produced since then has cited that there is no evidence that formal systems improve outcomes for children. Indeed, there was some concern that formal systems could have a negative impact on outcomes for children as there is a danger that social workers could be drawn into ticking boxes rather than exploring with the family the things that make a difference and what needs to change. These systems can also be time consuming and there is a concern that managers do not have the resources to operate a very detailed point based workload management system. In Redcar and Cleveland, a points system was previously in place but although this was simpler than many of the complex, time consuming and confusing caseload weighting systems which have been developed in recent years, it was ceased as team managers expressed that it did not always clearly and fully reflect the work and caseload activity being undertaken by their staff accurately.

In 2015, the Workforce Development Policy Committee issued a survey to local authorities regarding social work caseload levels for different social work staff. Although the survey attempted to identify a benchmark for caseloads, the results showed wide variation due to a range of issues, including the complexity of individual cases, the mix of cases in a caseload, the experience of the individual worker and the availability of appropriate support. In the main the majority of directors who responded to the survey explained that workload management tended to be the role of team managers who were familiar with their staff and their capacity. The majority of local authorities reported that they did not use any formal mechanism to weight cases prior to allocation. Allocation methods that did not contain any form of weighting included reflective supervision and senior management oversight of caseloads, which very much mirrors the case in Redcar and Cleveland.

Team managers in Redcar and Cleveland know their workers well and have expressed that they are able to confidently gauge each individual's different skills and abilities, as well as have an understanding of their resilience, capabilities and capacity.



The main purpose of any workload management system is twofold; one, to ensure that children and families are given timely, appropriate and good quality services, which enables social workers to build effective relationships and undertake direct work with children to understand ‘the child’s journey’ and two, to support social workers to feel safe, contained and confident in their abilities to practice competently and effectively.

To achieve this there needs to be a sufficient number of competent workers, who have caseloads that are manageable. Caseload management and workforce planning need to inform each other to try and ensure sufficient staff are available both in the short term and the longer term.

As a learning organisation, we will always consider new ways of working and delivering our services, balancing the need to spend public money in the most cost effective way with providing a safe service. Managing the demand with the most appropriate response has led to a major review of our ‘front door’ services resulting in the implementation of a Multi-Agency Children’s Hub (MACH) which receives all requests for information, advice and services. Referrals for social work assessments then come through to the duty and assessment team.

In Redcar and Cleveland, the team manager is accountable for effectively managing caseloads on a day-to-day basis and they take responsibility for allocating cases to a social worker. In order to ensure that caseloads are manageable, are evenly distributed both within both individual teams and across the unit and that there is fairness and consistency across the board, team managers should give consideration to the following:

## **Allocating caseloads:**

There are numerous factors that must be considered when allocating caseloads such as the needs of the child(ren) and family, the complexity and associated risk, the experience of individual workers, the number of working hours for individual workers (FTE), the capacity of the workforce as a whole, the services available, and pathways for escalation and de-escalation.

Managers will also need to be mindful of the make-up of caseloads including the following factors:

The number of Child Protection Cases held

The number of Children in Our Care Cases

The number of care proceedings cases

This should be considered alongside the stage that cases may be at, as this will depend on how much work and contact with any particular family this may entail for one worker at a given time. Managers will also need to consider the number of families that social workers are working with, appreciating that caseloads are based on the number of children and do not take into account sibling groups.

Critically reflective supervision, management audit and oversight are essential to ensure clear direction for casework, no drift and the right level of support for the worker. Other responsibilities must also be taken into account when considering caseload allocation such as supervisory responsibilities (for staff or students), professional development commitments (attendance at training/learning events) and any reasonable adjustments made as a result of disability or additional support needs. Team Managers are responsible for ensuring that no case is allocated to a social worker unless and until he/she is satisfied that the allocated social worker has the necessary training, experience and time to deal with it properly.

Newly qualified social workers (NQSW) will be allocated their cases by the Team Manager in consultation with the NQSWs ASYE assessor (if not the same). There should be an expectation that as their proficiency grows; the NQSW will be expected to manage increasingly complex cases with greater levels of risk/need. The NQSW will need a variety of cases to enable them to demonstrate sufficient capability in each area of the professional capabilities framework (PCF), however, NQSWs will not be allocated any child protection cases as key worker. Towards the end of their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) they may be allocated as co-worker as part of their development dependent on their confidence and skills. This should be identified and negotiated in supervision. As the co-worker they will not take the lead in any pieces of work in relation to that case that involves risk assessment and responsibility for the case remains with the allocated experienced worker.

Student social workers will be allocated as co-workers with their practice educator being the allocated social worker and taking responsibility for the allocation of specific tasks within the case to the student.

Social workers waiting for their registration from the regulatory body following successful completion of their social work training, are employed as social care officers and will be allocated cases but the



team manager will be allocated as a co-worker to oversee their practice.

When allocating a case to a social worker, the manager must ensure that the social worker is clear as to what has been allocated, what action is required and how that action will be reviewed and supervised.

Team managers will work with social workers to support them to prioritise their work and individual tasks when this is required. There will be regular workload management meetings chaired by the service manager and attended by the team managers. The current workload of each social worker is considered and this is not limited to numbers of children but the work currently going on with each family. Senior managers also need to have sight of caseload pressures and this should be an agenda item at performance discussions.

Team managers should work in consultation with the data team and make effective use of the department's performance management systems to ensure that social workers are carrying out their statutory duties in an appropriate and timely manner, to support the flow of work and to make sure that timescales and targets are being consistently achieved.

It is part of the team manager's role to support their social workers to better understand 'the wider picture' and the link between performance management, quality assurance, continuous improvement and effective service delivery.

Team managers should provide regular, reflective and effective supervision to staff in line with departmental expectations and regularly review workload and caseloads as part of this function. As part of the effective supervision and review process team managers should ensure that any unnecessary drift is addressed and that cases are stepped down or closed in a timely and appropriate way.

## Managing allocations:

**Appendix A** gives a guide to caseload numbers considering the above factors, although it is acknowledged that there may be some times when this is temporarily exceeded due to factors such as family size, having other cases still open which are awaiting transfer to the longer-term teams, awaiting closure or nearing a planned closure or step down, when colleagues unexpectedly go off

sick requiring their team members to cover, or if other members of the team are on holiday.

When caseloads exceed the recommended numbers, it is expected that weekly workload management meetings will take place to ensure that caseloads and how practitioners are managing these are reviewed and concerns are escalated to senior management so that strategies can be considered to resolve this, such as transferring cases within the unit or consideration of agency workers or additional staff to alleviate pressure.



## Appendix A

Team/service area	Maximum caseload per fte worker Part time worker's caseloads should be reflected pro-rata
Assessment team social workers deputy team manager	20 -22 children/young people 0 children/young people
Locality/field teams social workers deputy team manager	20 children/young people 10 children/young people
Children with Disabilities team	25 children/young people
Independent Reviewing Officers	70 (mix of CP conferences, Children in Our Care & foster carer reviews)
Children in Our Care team social workers	20 children/young people
Fostering team	18 foster carers to supervise & 3 new assessments at any one time
TARGET Leaving Care team	22 young people
Newly qualified social workers (10% protected caseload 10% protected development time) 0-6months 6-12 months	Allocations to build up to Max 15 children/young people 15 – 18 children/young people
Student social workers 1st placement 2 <sup>nd</sup> placement	Co-working cases only Allocated statutory tasks to undertake under guidance of practice educator

