

Family Services

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1. Purpose

Caseloads in Social Care are of key importance for purposeful social work which is emphasised in the Employer Standards (2014) stating that employers should:

Implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation in order to protect service users and practitioners.

- to deliver consistently high quality services and outcomes for children, adults, and families, employers should manage workflow effectively and respond quickly to changing demand
- workload management and case allocation processes should prevent work overload and safeguard staff and service users from the risks associated with high caseloads and unallocated cases.
- All employers should:
 - put in place transparent systems to allocate work and a means to collect information about workload within teams
 - use this information to assess and review the workload of each social worker, taking account of their capacity and allowing sufficient time for supervision and CPD activity
 - have contingency plans in place for resolving situations where workload demand exceeds the staffing capacity
 - have a system in place which generates relevant information to be used as part of regular reporting to strategic leaders and feeds into supply and demand models, and the social work accountability framework.

Research shows that...

“Staff turnover and high caseloads result in a lack of relationships between workers and families and a limited focus on child safety while also affecting the timeliness of decisions regarding safe and stable placements (GAO, 2003)”.

“Turnover affects the workload of the workers and supervisors who remain, sometimes resulting in decreased efficiency and burnout, which may lead to additional staff turnover as well as poorer case outcomes”.

2. Objective

The objective of this policy, in line with our vision to make Barnet the most Family Friendly borough by 2020, by enabling Resilient Families: Resilient Children, is to create an environment where social workers and other practitioners:

- deliver consistently high quality services and where Social Workers deliver purposeful social work
- achieve positive outcomes for children and families; and
- safeguard staff and service users from the risks associated with high caseloads and unallocated cases.

3. Standards

The eight standards for the support of social workers, recommended by the Social Work Task Force are:

- have in place a social work accountability framework informed by knowledge of good social work practice and the experience and expertise of service users, carers and practitioners
- use effective workforce planning systems to make sure that the right number of social workers, with the right level of skills and experience, are available to meet current and future service demands
- implement transparent systems to manage workload and case allocation in order to protect service users and practitioners
- make sure that social workers can do their jobs safely and have the practical tools and resources they need to practise effectively. Assess risks and take action to minimise and prevent them
- ensure that social workers have regular and appropriate social work supervision
- provide opportunities for continuing professional development, as well as access to research and practice guidance
- ensure social workers can maintain their professional registration; and
- establish effective partnerships with higher education institutions and other organisations to support the delivery of social work education and continuing professional development.

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

1. it is the strategic aim to achieve a manageable caseload of children or young people across services to enable Social Workers and other practitioners to provide a high standard of purposeful practice to children and families they work with
2. there may be **deviations from the average caseload** within each team depending on the range of responsibilities for safeguarding children carried by practitioners in different teams and the level of experience of individual practitioners
3. the number of cases on **the caseload of a social worker is in itself not a reliable measure** of the workload in the day-to-day work and as such cannot be used as an aid for the line manager to decide whether or not the practitioner has the capacity to take on new work or is able to deal with the current workload. The average caseload will be pro-rotat'd where social workers do not work full-time
4. it is expected that all part-time staff will carry out all casework required of the case, and where there are crucial dates i.e. court, it is expected the social worker will work to accommodate these
5. for practitioners who do not carry case responsibility for Child in Need, Child Protection or Looked After Children the **average caseload** may be higher
6. it is been recognised that ASYE Social Workers initially should have approximately 50% of a caseload in comparison to a post **ASYE qualified Social Worker**. However, their capacity increases throughout their assessed year as they gain experience. This will be agreed in supervision between them and their line manager

7. any deviations from the average caseload have to be agreed in **supervision**. If an individual holds a caseload higher than 22 this must be agreed by the Head of Service and an action plan put in place to reduce this number as soon as practicably possible
8. **Heads of Service and/or Team Managers must not carry a caseload;**
9. the movement of cases between social workers must follow the agreed transfer policy and must be noted by the manager in a case note on the records
10. cases should move from social worker to social worker **on the same day**; in the exceptional event that the above cannot happen (leave, sickness, etc.), then the case should be allocated to another member of the team pending the new worker becoming available. Where the case does not go directly to the allocated social worker, then the Team Manager must put a case note on the record to advise of the situation and identify any tasks to be completed by the temporarily allocated worker
11. where cases are allocated to social workers in their absence, due to unavoidable circumstances, the transferring social worker and/or team manager should provide a full-briefing on their return. Team managers must ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place to cover any casework required during the absence i.e. visits etc.; and
12. in cases of long term sickness or annual leave, **over 15 working days**; the case should be reallocated in line with (10) above and a case note from the Team Manger put on to the system. Where a social worker is unexpectedly absent there is an expectation they will provide an update to the Team Manager to ensure the case is managed safely in their absence.

4. Caseloads

Caseloads should be allocated so that there is a balance of complexity across the team and according to experience of individual social workers; where possible sibling groups should be allocated together. The average caseload across services in Barnet is:

Service/Team	Average Caseload per FTE
Duty and Assessment Team	16
Intervention and Planning	15
Disabled Children's Team	18
Children in Care	16
Adoption and Fostering	15
Leaving Care	20

Where a case no longer requires statutory social work intervention or can be 'stepped down' e.g. from CiC to CP or CP to CiN, the decision should be recorded and an appropriate plan put in place.

Cases that are not actively being worked by social workers should be closed.

5. Responsibilities

No.	Task	Responsible Officer	Record Required
1.	When allocating new cases the line manager has to review the current caseload of the practitioner who will be receiving a new case.	Line Manager	
2.	Where the workload of a worker exceeds the maximum number of cases the reason for allocating a new case has to be clearly recorded in the personal supervision folder.	Line Manager	Recorded on personal supervision file
3.	The Social Work Team Manager retains the right to allocate cases to social workers even if such allocation exceeds the maximum workload. Social Work Team Managers must explain the reason for this action to the social worker and take responsibility for reprioritising their workload. Such allocation must be time specified and subject to regular review.	Line Manager	Recorded on personal supervision file
4.	If the caseload continues to exceed the maximum workload for any longer than a two-month period, and it is the assessment of the Social Work Team Manager and the Social Worker that the work will be ongoing, The Head of Service must be informed who will attempt to rectify the situation.	Line Manager & Head of Service	Recorded on personal supervision file
5.	An analysis of Caseloads should be undertaken every week as part of the weekly performance information. Detailed case discussions should take place with the individual as part of regular personal supervision. This analysis includes: Any issues relating to the extent to the time available to work directly with children and families; Any issues to meeting other demands.	Line Manager	Recorded on personal file and where case specific to be recorded on LCS
6.	Team Managers and Heads of Service should review caseload each week through the weekly performance data. They should consider whether there are cases that should be closed as part of the allocation	Line Manager Head of Service	

	process		
6.	Average Caseloads of staff per team need to be reviewed by SMT monthly.	SMT	Recorded in Performance Matters report