

REPORT FROM THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUADRANTS TOPIC GROUP

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Seamus Quilty, David Lloyd [Chairman],
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Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To update Members of the work of the Topic Group.
- 1.2 To provide an interim report on Member visits to the Quadrants during the summer and themes arising from these visits.

2. Summary

- 2.1 Members of the Topic Group visited each Quadrant during August and September 2003.
- 2.2 The focus of the first set of visits was to examine accommodation and working conditions for staff in the Quadrants.
- 2.3 Members of the Topic Group will be considering the learning from the visits and the effect of the findings on the effectiveness of the Quadrants.

3 Conclusion

The Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the issues raised in the report and to identify areas on which they would like further information in the January report.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee on 18 June 2003 agreed to set up a Topic Group to scrutinise the following areas:
 - Timescales for Statements of Special Educational Needs
 - Volume of work and thresholds for intervention
 - Recruitment and retention of qualified staff
 - Children out of school
 - Risk to staff
 - Accommodation
 - IT Systems
 - Any other issues identified by the Topic Group
- 1.2 The first meeting of the Topic Group on 15 July 2003 agreed that the scrutiny work would be carried out through a series of visits by small groups of members to the Quadrants. They would be accompanied by an officer who would then produce a report on each visit.
- 1.3 The purpose of the visits was to consider the effectiveness of the Quadrants and to obtain views from staff regarding possible improvements. Member visits to Quadrants highlighted the need to focus, initially, on accommodation and working conditions as they were felt to be priority issues of concern for front line staff, which had an impact also on the effectiveness of service delivery
- 1.4 Members were keen not to delay proposed visits and, therefore, these visits took place during the holiday period, hence the availability of staff was limited and offices appeared relatively empty.
- 1.5 This report focuses on accommodation and working conditions. Future reports will consider other areas of the scrutiny as identified by members of the Topic Group.
- 1.6 The Topic Group will also consider the findings of these visits in more detail at their next meeting.
- 1.7 A summary of the Reports of the Visits are provided in Appendix 1.

2. Findings of the visits

The four visits to the Quadrants focussed on Accommodation and Working Conditions for staff. The Topic Group has not yet had an opportunity to consider how the issues raised and the Findings impact upon efficiency and effectiveness of the Quadrants. There are, however, some common themes which have been identified by members which would warrant further discussion and analysis. These are as follows:

2.1 Single Quadrant Base

Having a single Quadrant Base for each Quadrant has been an aim for CSF. There was evidence from these visits that efficiency and effectiveness of the work of staff in the sector may be improved if operated from a single base. Improvements include:

- Service delivery
- Improved communication
- Enhanced links between CSF and other key stakeholders
- Improved contact between Referral and Assessment Teams and Long-Term Teams

A single Quadrant base in which different professional staff were co-located was also seen to enhance the integrated nature of CSF. Co-location, however, is not the single determinant of integration: a culture and a willingness to work towards a common purpose are also important. There was some evidence that this was not yet fully worked through.

Where there is a single Quadrant Base (West Quadrant), there are many lessons to be learnt for other Quadrants if they are to move to a single Quadrant Base. These lessons include:

- Having a building that is fit for purpose
- Right image for service users and staff
- Adequate space for all functions
- Security and confidentiality
- Accessibility
- Correct environment e.g. heating, air conditioning, toilets, etc

Any further analysis of the visits could usefully concentrate on what the specification could be to provide a base which will ensure maximum effectiveness

2.2 Multiple Databases

One of the key aims of CSF was to have in place a fully integrated database. Members noticed that this is not currently fully in place. The database (Oracle) currently consists of a client index, which contains all relevant details about the child and family: details of any initial assessment and any Complex Needs Assessment undertaken. Each professional group has access to this Client Index and check when they receive a new Referral, whether or not the individual or family is being worked with by another staff member in CSF.

There is still reliance on other databases: Social Services Information System (SSIS): Special Education Needs (SEN): Education Welfare (EdEWO).

The effect of relying on these different databases could be the potential of a child or young person falling through the service net. It is expected that the Child Protection database will be installed and running by the year end. Looked After Children data could be installed early in 2004, and other databases later in 2004.

It is important that speedy progress is made on this issue as it will, radically, increase efficiency and effectiveness in the Quadrants about information sharing and the routine provision of management information. It will also meet one of the proposals in The Green Paper – 'Every Child Matters'.

2.3 Working Environments

The working environment can contribute greatly to the efficiency and effectiveness of staff and the experience of those who use services. Some of the staff talked to in the Quadrants were satisfied with their environment and felt valued. Others had a range of concerns which included:

- Safety of reception staff
- Lack of confidentiality
- Lack of physical space
- Too many staff in one room
- Having to share desks ('Hot Desking')
- Insufficient computers/lap tops
- Lack of storage/filing facilities

It is clear that the quality of the working environment is different both within and between Quadrants. This can have the effect of some staff feeling less valued than others and, subsequently, have an effect on their work effectiveness and the service they give to others.

A more detailed analysis of the issues raised by staff will, undoubtedly, bring forward some recommendations which can improve the efficiency of the Quadrants by improving the work environment.

2.4 Staffing

The key issue raised was vacancy rates for Social Workers and Educational Psychologists.

There has been a successful campaign to recruit Educational Psychologists and the current position is that there are 35.7 in post with 4.7 vacancies.

The Behaviour and Achievement Strategy and investment of additional resources has provided a strong and exciting recruitment and retention opportunity for Educational Psychologists.

CSF is experiencing difficulties in recruiting Qualified Social Workers. This is a National issue, compounded by the high cost of living in the South East. There are 152 Social Workers in permanent posts and 68 Professional Assistants (Unqualified Social Workers).

There are 54 Social Work vacancies. These vacancies are covered by Agency Staff (11) and Professional Assistants (28). There are 6 new starters in September leaving uncovered vacancies at 9 posts.

The impact on effectiveness of Quadrant working in having Qualified Social Work vacancies is the need to prioritise work and carefully manage workloads to ensure existing staff are not overburdened. Cases where children are 'at risk of harm' and children who are 'looked after' are prioritised for allocation. Other cases of 'Children in Need' are assessed but may then have to wait for a service.

Tasks which do not require a Qualified Social Worker are given to Unqualified Workers but Child Protection Investigations and Court Work can, and are, only undertaken by Qualified Workers.

CSF continues to advertise for Qualified Workers and are training Unqualified Staff. This year, 19 staff from CSF are sponsored on the DipSW Course – many of whom will return to the Quadrants.

CSF is also committed to offering, at least, 10 social work placements to students on DipSW Courses. Many of these students then take up permanent posts in Hertfordshire.

Members made available additional resources to pilot a CSF Worker Project. In 2002. Nineteen Workers were recruited to work 3 days a week in an identified school: 1 day a week in the Quadrants: and 1 day a week at the University of Hertfordshire – undertaking a specifically designed CSF Course.

- Eight of these workers are staying with the Project for 2003/04 – all part-funded by Schools
- Nine remain within CSF as Professional Assistants in Social Work Teams, Behaviour Support Teams and Residential Homes:
- A further 4 workers are currently being recruited to the CSF Worker Project bringing the number to 12 for this year

This project has proved to be an effective way of retaining staff.

3 Conclusion

3.1 During these visits, Members concentrated on the effectiveness of Quadrants using four determinants:

- Single Quadrant Base
- Multiple Databases
- Working Environment
- Staffing

A number of issues have been raised which could, if resolved, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Quadrant working. On future visits, Members will be able to supplement the knowledge gained in these visits and consider what other aspects of the work of the Quadrants should come under their scrutiny to, ultimately, improve the effectiveness of CSF.

4 Proposed Way Forward

The Topic Group has not yet had an opportunity to fully analyse the information gained from Quadrant visits and will do so at their next meeting.

The Topic Group will identify a Work Programme at the next meeting and report to the January Scrutiny Committee

5 Rural Implications

None arising from this report.

6 Financial implications

None arising from this report.

Background material referred to by the author while compiling this report:

Reports and minutes of CSF Scrutiny Committee meetings in January 2003 and June 2003.

Reports and minutes of the Effectiveness of Quadrants Topic Group.

Quadrant visit reports.

*Children Schools and Families CSF Workers Project 2002/03: How are we doing?
Published June 2003*

If you require further information about the issues referred to in this report please
contact: Cheryl Hopkins, Telephone: 01992 555916

APPENDIX 1

1 Summary of Visit Reports

1.1 North Quadrant – 12 August, 2003

Members present: Nigel Brook, Pat Cherry, Richard Smith

North Quadrant is based on three sites, with a total of 170 staff:

- The Old Grammar School, Stevenage
- Southgate, Stevenage
- The Valley School, Stevenage

The main points raised by staff during the visit were:

Members received feedback that a single Quadrant base would be the best way of delivering services in the North and staff expressed frustration about the uncertainty of not knowing if, and when, this may happen.

The vision of CSF was to have a single Quadrant base to facilitate cross team networking and integrated work. This has, largely, been achieved at The Old Grammar School but teams based in Stevenage and at The Valley School have not benefited to the same extent.

The day of the Members Visit was very hot (98° F) and so lack of air conditioning was a feature. Reception staff raised the issue of security in the Reception Area.

Staff expressed frustration at having to work with multiple databases and that Oracle had not lived up to expectations

2.1 West Quadrant – 21 August, 2003

Members present: Nigel Brook, Pat Cherry, Richard Smith, Lorna Kercher, David Lloyd

The main points raised during the visit were:

Porters Wood is a modern office building providing a good base for a key component of CSF i.e. multi-professional working. The West Quadrant is the only Quadrant that has all the professional groups in one building. The first CSF staff moved in in March 2001.

The office has 147 workstations and 190 staff but approximately two-thirds of the staff are 'mobile workers' (50% or more of time spent away from the office). This policy of "hot desking" is not popular with staff and they expressed great concern about not having their own desks.

Porters Wood is located on an Industrial estate and is difficult to access for staff or clients who do not have a car.

There are 67 parking spaces at Porters Wood and many staff have to park in nearby roads.

The entrance is not welcoming nor was it designed with access to the public in mind. Reception doors will need to be replaced to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, CCTV and a Door Access System has been requested.

Air conditioning has been a problem for 18 months and caused distress to staff. This has recently been resolved.

A positive feature brought to Members' attention was the number of meeting rooms available.

Good progress has been made towards providing staff with computers.

There has been a high turnover of staff both Social Workers and Educational Psychologists. This has had a detrimental effect on morale amongst staff.

There are no storage rooms for equipment and a shortage of filing space. The possibility of renting space in a building on the Industrial Estate is under consideration.

Staff felt they had not been approached for lessons to be learned in planning for one Quadrant base but felt the Scrutiny Group was a step in the right direction.

Members felt there was more dissatisfaction expressed about working conditions in West Quadrant than any other Quadrant

3.1 **South Quadrant – 22 August, 2003**

Members present: Pat Cherry, Tanis Kent, David Lloyd

There are 182 staff based in South Quadrant.

The main points raised by staff during the visit were:

Staff like working at Langleybury and would like this to be the permanent Quadrant Base.

Staff located on different sites (particularly Hertsmere) felt isolated and felt it has limited the opportunity to change working practices to be more integrated and was not an efficient deployment of staff and resources.

Staff expressed satisfaction with office accommodation and compared it to the problems of car parking and 'hot desking' experienced by staff in Porters Wood. Staff felt this was important in terms of staff morale and retention.

Members felt that this visit gave the most positive view of Quadrant working.

4.1 **East Quadrant – 12 September, 2003**

Members present: David Lloyd, Robert Gordon, Tanis Kent

There are 182 staff based in East Quadrant which is on four sites.

The main points raised by staff during the visit to each site were:

- **Parkway**

Positive feedback about CSF from International Workers.

Travelling time of workers was raised as East is such a large Quadrant.

- **County Hall**

Workers are positive about the location as it is central and easy access for clients.

The Referral and Assessment Teams expressed concern that they needed more staff and felt the amount of paperwork was onerous.

- **Waltham Cross**

The team are isolated from the Quadrant base so do not have opportunities for networking and sharing information and expertise with previous education colleagues.

Travelling time is a concern.

However, staff felt there was an advantage in being based in Waltham Cross as it was closer to clients.

- **Porters Lodge**

The Administrative Staff felt this was a positive environment.

International Social Workers have experienced problems with housing, but the manager is considered to have been very supportive.