

Agenda Item 6

Chief Executive Officer's Report

Author

Colum Conway, Chief Executive Officer

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Summary

This CEO report provides a review of some of the recent areas of work. Detailed performance reports, Management Information and Financial Reports on the Quarter 2 out turn, will be presented at the October board meeting. This will include a targeted review of Fitness to Practise.

Purpose

An update for the board covering the following areas:

- Response to Covid-19
- Working in partnership
- Regulation
- Policy

Response to Covid-19

We have agreed to maintain the temporary registration of returning social workers for a further period as part of the planning process for any potential increase requirements of social work services in the coming months. This will be kept under review.

We continue to have regular contact with the DfE and DHSC, the Chief Social Workers, the Principal Social Workers networks, the HEI sector and fast track programmes, and other key stakeholders to assess and respond to the impact of Covid-19 on social work and social work students and trainees.

One of the areas of impact for Covid-19 has been on social work students and trainees. We have worked with the programme providers to track the progress of final year students and trainees into the profession this year following disruption to placements and teaching since March 2020. At this stage, it appears that pass lists we have received from the HEI sector and the number of qualifying student and trainee applications for registration is holding up well; a more complete picture will emerge when all the programmes complete in September and October.

The office at Blonk Street in Sheffield, reopened with safety measures in place at the end of July 2020. On a voluntary basis, a small number of staff have returned to work in the office for two or three days per week. We anticipate that over time, the numbers using the office will increase and we will continue to assess and update the safety measures in line with local and

national guidelines. At this stage we have plans in place to begin having physical Fitness to Practise hearings for some cases from October 2020.

Working in Partnership

I have had regular meetings with the Chief Executives of the Health and Social Care Professional regulators group sharing information on responses to Covid-19, discussing the progress of regulatory reform, and exploring opportunities for collaborative working.

The Social Work and Social Care regulators in the four jurisdictions of the UK, Scottish Social Services Council, Northern Ireland Social Care Council, Social Care Wales and Social Work England are meeting to continue to build a strong working relationship and agreement across the UK, for social work and social work students and trainees. Meetings are also being held with CORU, the social work regulator in Ireland and Skills for Care and Development, the sector skills partnership for social care in the UK.

I have continued to meet on a regular basis with the Chief Executives of the Arm's Length Bodies of the DfE along with the senior team and the permanent secretary of the department to share information and experiences. I am attending the Vulnerable Children's Board at DfE.

Recently I had the opportunity to participate as a panel member in the successful live launch event for the Guardian Social Lives research on how social workers feel about the profession. Social Work England assisted the Guardian with the research and many of the findings mirror our own research which will be presented at this meeting.

Overall, our visibility has increased across the sector in the build up to renewals, and we have an increased presence with stakeholders, trade press, as well as the direct engagement. This is significant as part of our establishment as the new regulator and is assisting in the development of an improving collaboration on the issues affecting the profession of social work in England.

Regulation

We have been working collaboratively with the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) throughout the year to share all accepted disposal decisions made by our case examiners at the point they are made. In total, 22 decisions have been shared with the PSA so far.

In August the PSA provided a detailed report on each decision it had reviewed. It was noted in this report that generally the outcomes delivered so far by our case examiners were largely sufficient to protect the public and addressed the concerns about the individual practitioners.

However, concerns were raised about the circumstances where accepted disposal had been used by the case examiners to conclude fitness to practise proceedings so that a social worker could voluntarily retire from the register.

Our process for voluntary removal was developed in collaboration with Government lawyers in early 2019 and the proposals were subject to public consultation later in the year. Our internal decision review group has reviewed each outcome produced using this process so far.

Following the concerns raised by the Professional Standards Authority, we have taken action to suspend the process and we have instructed external legal counsel to advise again on the established process and any suitable amendments if required.

The Social Work England Annual Monitoring process for the training and education sector is due to begin later in September. This will be a more detailed process for the sector with a focus on four key areas – a declaration on how the programmes are meeting the current standards, how the programmes have responded to Covid19, how the programmes are preparing to implement our new standards in 2021, and other data in relation to drop out rates and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Considerable focus has been put on preparations for our first renewals period and associated requirements for social workers to evidence their CPD. Separate reports on this work will be presented to the board.

Policy

Over the last few weeks, we have been discussing plans and financial forecasts with our sponsor team as part of considerations for the government comprehensive spending review, which is due for completion in the coming months. The stands of work we are focusing on will ensure we can deliver on the objectives as outlined in our strategic/corporate plan.

We are continuing to keep under review any implication for the social work profession in England due to Brexit. Of note recently is the consultation from the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications and Regulation of Professions – we are reviewing for relevance to the regulation of social work across the UK.

Conclusion

This report touches briefly on a few key developments, some of which will be presented in more detail in the meeting.

The board is invited to note the contents and to note that a more detailed paper on performance review for Quarter 2 will be presented to the board at the meeting in October, this will include a targeted review of performance in Fitness to Practise.