Notes from Principal Social Worker Network Meeting 10/06/25

Attended: Annelies Henshall, Oxfordshire (Chair); Lara Patel, DCS; Katie Smee-Giles, East Sussex; Diana Obreja, Kent; Clare Poyner Portsmouth; Victoria Clottey, Isle of Wight; Dora Gouveia Schofield, West Berkshire; Shungu Chigocha, Windsor & Maidenhead; Helen Gore, Bracknell Forest; Lori Goossen, Medway; Rachel Stanbrook, Southampton (cover for Stuart Webb); Jenny Boyd, SESLIP PSW Convenor

Apols: Tom Stibbs, Brighton & Hove; Melanie Spencer, West Sussex; Michaela Smith, Slough; Alison Criddle, Hampshire; Stuart Webb, Southampton

1. **Intro from Lara Patel, DCS**

Stressed the level of support from regional DCS group for PSW Network and view from DCSs and SESLIP that the Network has potential for playing a key role in development of policy and practice. Attendance at the Network is strongly encouraged by DCS group but is not mandatory, success or not will depend on whether the members perceive its usefulness. PSW Network is one of 12 regional networks, all facilitated by and affiliated with SESLIP.

1. **Discussion about members’ views/wishes/hopes/expectations from the Network**

Input from the group:

* Shared learning
* Action plan informed by locally set priorities, which are linked to national network priorities
* Debate regarding the varied nature of the PSW role and how it works across the region
* Discussion about how LAs are managing social care transformation and local government reform (devolution)
* Collaboration on regional development
* Opportunity to network and peer support – including consideration of PSW “buddy scheme” for new PSWs
* Strengthen the regional PSW voice both within the region itself and nationally
* Promote reflective practice and joint problem solving
* Establish shared resource directory and group chat for easy exchange of ideas and to request support
* Link to regional and national policy groups (via SESLIP and the national PSW Network)
* Establish values eg generosity and willingness to share
* Share challenges and successes
* Provide communication channels between regional PSW Network and DCSs and between the network and individual local authorities
* Point of reference and contact for internal and external enquiries

Shungu shared the national PSW priorities.

1. **Update from SESLIP – DfE funded improvement work**

SESLIP has recently been advised of a significant uplift in DfE funding to deliver improvement initiatives across the region. This is for CSC and for SEND. Work is currently underway to draw up plans for spend and there will be opportunities for the SESLIP regional networks to develop projects, make suggestions to inform those plans and potentially deliver some of the work. There will be a programme of targeted support for local authorities who request this. There is a specific emphasis on how LAs identify and respond to extra-familial harms, child sexual abuse (in response to IICSA) and domestic violence (under Outcome 3 of the National Framework) to identify areas of good practice and share learning.

1. **Regional updates**

Members shared information regarding the range of responsibilities they hold as PSW in their respective LAs. This reflected a wide range, the most common include:

* Learning and development
* Delivering training
* Practice improvement
* EDI
* Recruitment activity

Several PSWs hold the DCSO role and increasingly PSWs are taking on equivalent responsibilities across the whole of children’s services (inc education). PSWs are commonly asked to either lead or contribute to specific projects eg development of reunification policy and practice, ethical use of AI, participation and engagement, international recruitment. Some PSWs hold an operational role (Responsible Officer within residential/Service Manager for CWD), this is more unusual but potentially growing.

This is an area that members would like more opportunity to discuss within the Network. Other suggestions for future agendas are:

* Use of AI
* How WRES is being implemented and managed

1. **Draft Terms of Reference**

As there was insufficient time to fully discuss and agree and sign off the ToR, it was agreed that this exercise would be completed off line following the meeting, Jenny to circulate the draft alongside suggested dates for the whole of this year. There was a general consensus that meetings should be more frequent than quarterly, with 8 weekly/bi-monthly meeting with most agreement. There was also consensus that physical meetings were unrealistic to achieve best attendance. Length of meeting to be decided.

1. **Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair**

Annelies has agreed to remain as Chair for the immediate future to support the re-establishment of the Network and Katie offered to act as Vice Chair – huge thanks from the group to both!

**Next meeting: 30.7.25 10.00 – 12.30**