

Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 28 November 2016

Report of: Nigel Moorhouse, Director of Children's Social Care

Subject/Title: Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Liz Durham, Children and Families Portfolio Holder

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on recruitment activity and workforce stability since these issues were last considered by the committee in January 2016. As before, we are aware from discussions around the region that the recruitment and retention of social workers and team managers remains a challenge for all local authorities. Therefore whilst improvements in our ability to attract permanent experienced staff are to be welcomed, there is still an ongoing need for a cohort of agency workers as identified below.
- 1.2 Activity is planned and monitored by the Recruitment & Retention Task Group under the leadership of the Children and Families Social Care senior management team. Membership of the group includes senior managers from across the service, representatives from Workforce Development, HR and the Communications Team. The Recruitment & Retention Strategy for 2015-17 retains four key priorities:
 - to recruit sufficient permanent high quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience
 - to retain existing employees by ensuring they have the right skills, equipment and support to carry out their roles effectively
 - achieve manageable social worker caseloads
 - increase engagement and communication with social work staff

2. Recommendation

Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the contents of this report and the workforce data in **Appendix 1**
- 2.2 Endorse the Recruitment & Retention activity that has already taken place to improve stability in the workforce.
- 2.3 Propose any additional recruitment and retention activity for consideration by the recruitment and retention task group.

3 Background

- 3.1 By the turn of this year, it was already apparent that we had entered a new phase of our improvement plan. As turnover has continued to reduce and the workforce has stabilised, we have been able to move from a rolling programme of social worker recruitment to a more targeted approach as individual vacancies in the various parts of the service arise. We believe that Cheshire East is increasingly seen to be an 'employer of choice' in the region as evidenced by the growing number of enquiries, applications and appointments of more experienced workers: of the eighteen permanent full-time social workers that we have recruited to our front-line teams in 2016 thus far, eleven have practised elsewhere and of these, seven have joined the Child Protection Teams; in addition, we have appointed four Supervising Social Workers to the Fostering Service and two social workers to the Emergency Duty Team. The permanent appointment of two experienced Child Protection Managers to the CiN/CP Team in Crewe has also had a significant impact on stability and morale in arguably the most challenging area of the service.
- 3.2 The consequences for our vacancy position and use of agency workers are as follows:
- Two agency Service Managers are covering long term sickness absence in the CiN/CP Teams; one of these arrangements will end in December and the other will continue until early in the New Year; we also retain an agency manager at this level whilst the review of our work with children with disabilities is completed.
 - In CHECS there are two agency social workers, one covering maternity leave and another in a position that is about to be advertised; an experienced Safeguarding Manager from a neighbouring local authority was recently appointed to the position of Service Manager and she will join us in January when the current postholder leaves.
 - The CiN/CP Team in Macclesfield is essentially fully staffed and agency workers are only used to cover maternity leave.
 - In Crewe, seven agency social workers are covering vacancies, five of which have arisen through increases in the staffing establishment and two are covering maternity leave. Recruitment activity continues to prioritise this area of the service.
 - In the Permanence and Throughcare Team in Middlewich there is one agency social worker and one manager, both covering vacancies that are currently advertised.
 - In Fostering and Adoption, there are three agency social workers covering advertised vacancies; there is also an agency manager who has been retained whilst plans for the Regional Adoption Agency are finalised.
 - In the Independent Review Officers (IRO) Service, there are now only two agency workers after recruitment to the cared for children team; further

targeted recruitment is planned to fill these two vacancies. There are no vacancies or agency workers amongst the Child Protection IROs.

3.3 Feedback about our recruitment activity continues to be positive and many candidates have spoken enthusiastically about the information available to them on the microsite, the response they get to using the Register Interest button and their overall experience at interview. Our efforts have now received wider recognition in that we have been shortlisted at the 'Children & Young People Now' Annual Awards in the category of Recruitment and Professional Development. Ongoing activity includes:

- A continued focus on advertising through social media to support our programme of Social Worker, Team Manager and IRO recruitment; further interviews for these positions are scheduled.
- We are currently looking at participation in two Government schemes designed to attract and assist people into careers in social work. The 'Step-Up to Social Work' Programme provides financial assistance to people who might otherwise not be able to finance their way through a degree course; in the past year for example, we have had perhaps half a dozen enquiries from associated professionals such as teachers and nurses who could potentially benefit from this scheme.
- The 'Come Back to Social Work' Scheme aims to target social workers who for one reason or another may have left the profession and who are now interested in returning; in particular, this programme will assist people in re-establishing their eligibility to register with the HCPC.
- Interviews for the third cohort of our Sponsored Student Scheme will have taken place by the time of this meeting; this programme is designed to attract the best students from our partner Universities and successful completion of it guarantees the applicant a position as social worker.
- We anticipate that adoption and our planned 'Signs of Safety' as our underpinning model of social work intervention will further help to foster a sense of job satisfaction amongst the social work teams and therefore impact positively on retention. The model is well known throughout the sector and implementation will commence early in the New Year.
- We have joined the North-West Midlands Teaching Partnership which is coordinated through Keele University and we anticipate that this will assist us with recruitment into the south of the Borough as well as offering opportunities to better support existing employees with their CPD.
- The role of Advanced Practitioner (with an implementation date of 17th October) was established following feedback from the social work teams and will foster retention by creating a more clearly defined career pathway, particularly for those many workers who want to continue their professional development, but who do not necessarily aspire to a management position.

4 Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 4.1 As identified above, our recruitment strategy and activity is focused on improving the position across the borough but particularly in the Crewe Child Protection Team where historically, we have found it more difficult to attract experienced social workers and team managers.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Recruitment activity supports the Council's statutory obligations in relation to work with children and families.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 An agreement to cap agency rates of pay has been in force across the region for a number of months and we are meeting with colleagues from other authorities in the coming weeks to review its effectiveness. Whilst there are some individual examples, the overall sense across the service is that we are now losing fewer workers to agencies. As we have noted previously, lower staff turnover benefits the Council both financially (in terms of recruitment, induction and training costs) and qualitatively in making our work with vulnerable families more effective.

7 Equality Implications

- 7.1 The recruitment and retention strategy ensures that the Council continues to improve outcomes for its most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and their families.

8 Rural Community Implications

- 8.1 There are none identified at this stage

9 Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 Colleagues in HR are fully engaged in the delivery of our Recruitment Strategy.

10 Public Health Implications

- 10.1 The strategy supports positive public health outcomes.

11 Risk Management

- 11.1 The hope expressed in January was that *'now that Ofsted have recognised our significant improvement in safeguarding and our good adoption service, this will only serve to make Cheshire East an increasingly attractive proposition for new and experienced social work staff.'* There is good

evidence to believe that this expectation is being realised, particularly in the north of the Borough where the response to our recruitment activity is always strong. However, whilst there are encouraging signs in the south now, it would be premature to believe that the challenges of attracting and retaining experienced social workers and managers have been fully met. On this basis, social worker recruitment should remain on the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

Contact Information

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Appendix 1: Workforce Profile

Post Qualifying Experience

		April 14	April 15	June 15	Sept 15	Dec 15	Oct 16	Optimum Profile
Grade 8	Newly qualified, less than 1 years' experience, completing ASYE.	17%	18% (22)	18%(21)	16%(19.5)	13%(16.5)	11%(13)	15%
Grade 8	More than 1 years' experience completed ASYE.		11% (13)	14%(17)	18%(21)	20%(25)	25%(31)	
Grade 9 & 10	Grade 9 – have 2 years or more experience Grade 10 – have Specialist Awards	58%	52% (62)	49%(60)	50%(60)	52%(64)	52%(63)	80%
Agency staff	All agency staff have 2 years or more experience.	25%	18% (22)	18%(22)	16%(19.5)	14%(17.5)	12%(15)	5%

Staff Turnover

Four permanent members of staff have left the authority this quarter (from 1st July 2016 to 30th September 2016), 3 were Social Workers and 1 Team Manager. In this quarter there have been 11 permanent new starters including 7 Social Workers, 2 Team Managers and 2 IROs. All Team Managers posts which are not held by permanent staff are filled by experienced agency staff who are committed to seeing through improvement in Cheshire East.

Duration with	Less than 1 year	Between 1 and 2	Between 2 and 5	Between 5 and 10	Over 10 years
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Cheshire East		years	years	years	
% staff	22%	20%	18%	14%	25%

Time in Current Role	Less than 1 year	Between 1 and 2 years	Between 2 and 5 years	Between 5 and 10 years	Over 10 years
% staff	27%	24%	28%	13%	9%

Average Caseloads of Staff

Team	Average Caseload
CIN/CP Team - Crewe	18
CIN/CP Team – Macclesfield	22
Adoption	17
Permanence & Throughcare	19
Children and Families Support Team	18