

Cheshire East Council

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 18th June 2019

Report of: Steve Nevitt, Service Manager Resources

Subject/Title: Recruitment and Retention

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the committee with a summary of recent recruitment activity and some further thoughts to foster and improve social worker retention.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and approve any further strategies to address the recruitment and retention of social workers as appropriate.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The recruitment and retention of social workers has featured on the Council's Corporate Risk Register for some time; however whilst there are still areas where recruitment is something of a challenge, the overall position is positive and suggests that our overall strategy is effective.

4. Summary

- 4.1 Since the appointment of the new Director of Children's Social Care, the Recruitment and Retention Group which oversees our activity in this area, has been expanded into a Workforce Planning Forum to consider a person's whole career journey through the department from student placement through to manager development. This meeting brings together officers from across the Council in HR, Workforce Development, Children's Services and others as necessary to plan, review and evaluate our strategy and work-streams.
- 4.2 We have recently conducted a round of recruitment activity and the highlights are as follows:
- It is pleasing to report that there are currently no agency social workers or managers in either of the CiN/CP teams. In particular, recruitment and retention of social workers in Crewe which has previously been our most significant area of challenge has improved and stabilised dramatically. We believe that this is likely to be the result of our positive and developing

working relationships with Staffordshire and Keele Universities through the local Teaching Partnership and the impact on our ability to attract students from the area into placement.

- Although there are also no agency social workers in Macclesfield, recruitment has been slower of late with fewer applicants expressing a preference to work there; as we're in a different Teaching Partnership, our relationships with the Manchester Universities are not as well developed and therefore we are likely to use our Sponsored Programme to specifically target their best students later in the summer.
- Over the past year or more in the Cared for Children's Service (where we have traditionally been able to attract social workers internally) recruitment and retention has been surprisingly difficult and we currently have five agency workers. We believe that travel has been a significant contributory factor in this which is just one more reason why we should always endeavour to place our children in homes and families within the Borough wherever possible. We have been able to recruit to a number of posts however, and by August when the last of our new starters joins us, we should only have one agency worker who is covering maternity leave.
- There are no vacancies in the Fostering Service or amongst the Child Protection Chairs; in the Independent Review Team, there are currently two agency staff, one of whom is covering the acting up arrangements for the manager's role.

4.3 Members of the Committee may already be aware that there was recently some adverse publicity for the department in relation to social worker caseloads and retention. In both these cases, our data had been reported inaccurately and we do not believe that we are an outlier against either comparator authorities or across the NW region in relation to retention in particular. The issue of social worker caseloads is more complex and there is evidence to suggest that we have fallen behind the best authorities in this regard; it is certainly a factor to which Ofsted will pay close attention and it is a fact that high caseloads have tended to be a common feature of recent poor inspections.

4.4 Whilst we have done well recently in relation to recruitment, retention and agency staffing, there can now be no question that pay is an issue and again, it is clear that we are starting to fall behind other Councils in this respect. A recent trawl of the main recruitment websites showed the following starting salaries for newly qualified social workers against the £26,470 on offer here:

Herefordshire: £28,221 + bonus Sandwell: £29,636
Manchester: £27,688 Hampshire: £28,272

4.5 In turn, we are also behind with salaries for progressed social workers which could in part explain why some people complete the ASYE programme with us and then start looking to move elsewhere. Whilst salary is only one aspect of a complex dynamic, when one repeatedly hears that first year social

workers are anxious about failing to submit their travel expenses in time, it is probably time to finally address this matter more proactively.

5. Developments

- 5.1 Later this year, we plan to introduce an assessment centre model of selection to replace our current interview and written exercise; this will include an introduction from the Director and/or Heads of Service, a group activity, values based exercises and separate young people's and panel interviews. This will create a better experience for candidates (who always have a choice to apply elsewhere) and a more rounded and effective selection process.

6. Contact Information

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