

28th January, 2019

No. 7

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr T. Wilson – Childrens Services

Executive Summary:

Social Work is a varied, demanding, often emotional but very rewarding career. Walsall Children's Services is committed to developing a stable and skilled Social Work workforce that can meet the changing needs of the children and young people that we work with.

In order to achieve consistently high outcomes for service users, social workers must have the skills and knowledge to establish effective relationships with children, adults and families, professionals in a range of agencies and settings and members of the public.

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2016-2020 aims to increase the numbers of permanent Social Workers and reduce reliance upon agency staff.

This report evidences the significant progress that has been achieved in the last two years in recruiting high numbers of quality newly qualified social workers and a number experienced social workers and managers. This has been achieved through a range of recruitment initiatives outlined in the body of this report.

Whilst we are able to attract newly qualified social workers our current challenge is to retain our permanent social workers and maintain their employment within Walsall as our turnover of social workers remains high although it is reducing. This is set within the context of a highly competitive regional market place for high performing social worker practitioners. Therefore we need to ensure that Walsall is viewed as a progressive, innovative and attractive place to work through positive profiling and marketing of Walsall Council.

Reason for scrutiny:

Members recognise the importance of a maintaining a skilled and stable social work service in order to meet the needs of Walsall citizens and seek assurance of the progress being made to achieve this outcome.

Recommendations:

Scrutiny notes and supports the contents of the report and notes progress to date in the recruitment and retention of social workers in Walsall.

Resource and legal considerations:

Not Applicable.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

Strategic priority 2018-2021

- Children have the best start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.

Citizen impact:

The recruitment of a skilled and stable workforce is crucial to the effective delivery of Social Work services to vulnerable children, young people and their families in Walsall.

Environmental impact:

None noted

Performance management:

There is robust monitoring of the staffing vacancies, staff turnover and use of agency staff both at DMT and the Recruitment and Retention working group.

Reducing inequalities:

The recruitment of a skilled and stable workforce is crucial to the effective delivery of Social Work services to vulnerable children, young people and their families in Walsall. This includes children, young people and their families from protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion.

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1. Recruitment and Retention Of Social Workers

Update since last Scrutiny report

- 1.1 Since the last report to scrutiny in February 2018, the current recruitment and retention strategy has been refreshed and re-focused in recognition of the successes that have been achieved in relation to recruitment and to focus on retention. We have continued to be successful in recruiting cohorts of newly qualified Social Workers, whilst our numbers of permanent experienced social workers have remained fairly stable.
- 1.2 Our staffing figures (based on our full staffing establishment of 237.3) for November 2018 indicate a vacancy rate of 22.18 %, agency rate of 24.3% and a staff turnover rate of 30.11%. Whilst these figures remain high, there has been a significant improvement in the last 5 months, where our turnover previously reached over 32%. The national turnover rate for social workers is 15%, so there is still further progress to be made. Our Recruitment and Retention Steering Group reviews the patterns and trends that these figures highlight giving attention to those areas of highest turnover. Some service areas have achieved high levels of permanent Social Workers, eg Corporate Parenting Service. The highest level of turnover is experienced within in our Safeguarding and Family Support Service which is our largest service area.
- 1.3 Newly qualified social workers undertake an Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) when they first join the Local Authority. This is a well-structured and supported introduction to the field of social work and Walsall has gained a very positive reputation regionally for the quality of its ASYE programme. In recognition of the difficulty we have experienced in recruiting experienced social workers, we took a decision to maximise the number of newly qualified social workers that we could attract and employ, hence the spike in our current cohort.
- 1.4 The table below identifies the breakdown of staff in each service area, indicating the level of permanent employees and agency workers within each. This data gives a clear indication of the progress that has been made in the recruitment of managers across the frontline service areas. All manager posts are permanently filled except one within Safeguarding and Family Support Service, the successful replacement is due to take up post on 1st March 2019. This is a significant achievement and provides a solid platform to attract new Social Workers to Walsall.

Staffing Establishment						
	IRS	SFS	CwDT	CPS	Provider Services	Total:
Group Manager	1	2	0	1	1 (0P, 1A)	5
Team Manager	3	10 (9 P, 1 A)	1	4	3 (1P, 2A)	18
Assistant Team Manager	6	0	1	0	3 (2P, 1A)	7

Senior Practitioner	0	10 (8 P, 2 A)	1	4		15
Social Worker	31 (24 P, 10 A)	70.5 (48 P, 23 A)	8 * (6 P, 3 A)	29 (26 P, 2 A)	31 * (29 P, 5A)	138.5 (104 P, 43 A)
Permanent experienced SW	16	25	3	20	29	64
ASYEs	8	23	3	6	0	40
Agency	10	23	3	2	5	43

Key: P – Permanent, A – Agency
 IRS – Initial Response Service
 SFS – Safeguarding and Family Support Service
 CwDT – Children with Disabilities Team
 CPS – Corporate Parenting Service

* This denotes where there are additional agency workers over establishment to cover maternity leaves

1.5 Provider Services include the Fostering and Adoption Teams and have always enjoyed relative stability in the workforce. During the last 6 months, there has been an increased reliance upon agency social workers in this area, because of high levels of maternity leave and a couple of vacant posts. There is however, some greater reliance upon agency staffing at management levels which will be rectified with the movement to the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) and re-structure of the fostering service thereafter.

2. Recruitment Initiatives:

2.1 We have achieved our current success by continuing our recruitment initiatives for newly qualified Social Workers. These include:

- Increasing the number of student Social Work placements offered that can potentially transfer into employment opportunities. This year we have accommodated 23 student placements, the highest number we have ever achieved.
- The **Guaranteed Interview Scheme** for all Social Work students that successfully complete their final 100 day placements with Walsall Council. We recruited 8 out of our 9 final year students from last year as permanent employees.
- **Return to Social Work Scheme** was launched in 2017 and has attracted 5 Social Workers to join the Local Authority through a protected route initially being placed in Early Help and they have since transitioned into frontline Social Work roles.

- The fast track Social Work qualification routes of **Step Up to Social Work** and **Frontline** are now a key feature of our recruitment drive. Both routes provide qualified Social Workers following an intense qualification process.
- Walsall has a strong presence at the Birmingham **Compass Recruitment Fair** in March every year. At the last Compass event in March 2018, we received 202 expressions of interest from potential candidates registering with our talent pool. This converted into 80 applications for posts across Childrens Services and the recruitment of 15 ASYE social workers.
- **Marketing** of Walsall as a progressive, innovative Council is key to our ongoing success. The development of the Walsall Right 4 Children Vision and exposure through the use of Social Media, 'Social Work Matters' Microsite and attendance/representation at local, regional and national events and within research projects are key to the ongoing success of our recruitment campaigns.

2.2 For more experienced Social Workers we developed a fast-track application process through our Social Work Matters microsite. Experienced social workers are able to upload their CV on our microsite and receive a formal response within 48 hours to their application. The microsite has received positive feedback from applicants for providing comprehensive information and a very easy application process. We have recruited a substantial number of external Social Workers and internal applicants with agency Social Workers and Managers electing to convert to permanent employees. This route has facilitated the appointment of 7 Team Managers, 2 Assistant Team Managers, 2 Senior Practitioners and 10 Social Workers.

3. Retention Initiatives:

3.1 We recognise the need to focus our attention on retaining our social workers. To achieve this, our retention initiatives have been informed by the considerable research in this area and the results of our Social Work Health Check. Research in this area identifies the following key factors that are important in achieving success.

- Good management support and levels of supervision
- Improved work-life balance
- Good Continuous Professional Development Opportunities (CPD)
- Feeling valued by the organisation

3.2 At the same time, the Council is undertaking a programme of change under the Proud Programme. Within Childrens Services the Transformation programme will afford Social Workers the opportunity to work differently with children and families to meet need at the earliest level, aligned and ultimately co-located with colleagues in Early Help and other key partners within the locality that they will serve and opportunities to develop specialist roles within those localities or Specialist teams, eg Court and Permanency Hub. We believe that whilst ensuring that the right children and family's needs will be met "at the right place, at the right time for the right amount of time", it will also enrich the experience of social work practitioners.

3.3 Our Social Work Health Check is undertaken in April every year. It is an important barometer of workflow and barriers to effective practice and by completing it annually any problems can be picked up and addressed in a timely fashion rather than becoming entrenched and creating a negative culture, ensuring that social workers feel that they are listened to and we have been pro-active in tackling the issues that affect them on the frontline. Our most recent health check in 2018 42 % of social workers responded and identified the following key strengths and areas of development:

Key strengths:

- 72% of SWs feel proud to work for Walsall Council
- 86.3% rated the training received in the last 12 months as Good or Excellent
- 98.4% of SWs have access to research and learning that supports your practice
- 91.1% of SWs receive supervision at a frequency in line with the Supervision Policy
- 75% of SWs receive regular feedback and updates from manager's meetings
- 90.2% of SWs have not taken any stress related sick leave in the last 12 months

Areas for improvement:

- 40% of SWs identified that workloads are difficult to manage and worked well over their contracted hours.
- 40.7% of SWs had not had their annual Employee Performance Review.
- 39% SWs said that they were spending less than 8 hours spent on direct contact with children, young people, carers and families.
- 72.4% of SWs said communication between staff and senior managers is only 'partly' effective
- 78.1% of SWs wanted to be more involved and consulted in proposed changes in relation to their team or wider service.

- When asked what factors would influence their decision to stay working at Walsall Council, the top 3 factors given were:
 - Manageable caseloads – 64% (29)
 - Supportive Manager – 60% (27)
 - Better working environment; career progression and pay and other benefits – 44% (20)

3.4 Good Management Support and levels of supervision: Walsall is committed to promoting strong leadership and management for the future. As outlined earlier the role of management is significant in retaining high quality Social Workers, therefore we have sought to support the development of a consistent management culture of expected behaviours through the Owning and Driving Performance (ODP) Programme and Restorative Practice. All managers have now completed the ODP programme and are expected to use in-time "coaching" to enable staff to develop their own strategies for problem-solving. This, combined with the Restorative Approach of "high support, high challenge" is seeking to provide the framework within which good social work practice can flourish.

3.5 The Council is also investing in the **Firstline Programme**, a leadership programme aimed at developing good social work managers into "great managers". In developing a permanent, consistent and highly competent tier of first-line managers, we will in turn create the conditions for high performing social work teams, within which Social Workers

will want to work. Our first cohort of four Managers completed the programme in December 2018, with a second cohort having started in November 2018. We are committed to providing all our Team Managers with the opportunity to attend this leadership programme.

3.6 Walsall has championed **Supervision** as one of the key ingredients in supporting safe and effective social work practice. The introduction of the Supervision Compliance Reporting Tool has demonstrated to all managers the importance placed upon the delivery of regular supervision and actions have been taken when there has been evidence that supervision has not been provided in certain service areas/teams. All managers are expected to proactively plan their supervision sessions in advance and this will seek to ensure greater commitment to prioritising those sessions. The introduction of the Practice Standards in relation to both Supervision and Management Decision Records have provided clarity of expectation and standards to which all Managers need to aspire.

3.8 Improved work-life balance: The Unit model was launched in Spring 2017 to create increased cohesion and sense of belonging for social workers. Supervision, both formal and informal, alongside weekly unit meetings provide a barometer to Managers in relation to the emotional wellbeing of their social workers. Social Work is an extremely emotionally challenging profession and it is vital to the wellbeing of staff that they are able to access regular opportunities to de-brief and seek support and strategies in managing their stress. Workers and their Managers are able to access Stress Management workshops to manage and recognise their own emotional regulation and identify potential signs of feeling overwhelmed. In addition to this, workers are able to access a range of support through Walsall's Health and Wellbeing Offer to promote a good work/life balance. The Social Work Health check indicated that workloads are a key factor in causing stress and therefore the management of workloads is a key component of this strategy.

3.9 There has been significant investment in social work posts in the last 3 years to ensure that Walsall is well placed to enable social workers to maximise their impact in working directly with children and families through the development of a “**manageable workload**” that enables more direct work with children and young people. There has been significant success in achieving a manageable workload in Corporate Parenting Service (CPS), with social workers having an average of 16 children / young people to work with. In Safeguarding and Family Support Service (SFS), whilst there had been progress towards a manageable workload, it remains an area of real challenge and average caseloads currently stand at 18.8 children, although we are aware that the most experienced social workers will be allocated between 20 - 26 children.

3.10 Walsall Council also promotes a Family Friendly and Work Life Balance philosophy. Social Workers are able to request flexible working arrangements that meet their requirements alongside those of the organisation to ensure that good practitioners remain on the frontline. Examples of this are when social workers have requested compressed hours or periods of extended leave (sometimes unpaid) to support their family commitments.

3.11 Good Continuous Professional Development Opportunities (CPD) All social work staff are able to access a comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional

Development (CPD) through the Walsall Right for Children Academy. This programme comprises a selection of courses including evidence-based assessment tools and celebrated practice experts in the field of social work to enhance their knowledge and skills. The quality of the training and development has been sighted as an important factor in retaining staff. All programmes and training courses offered are mapped against the Knowledge and Skills statements for the Child and Family Practitioner and Practice Supervisor (for management roles).

3.12 Walsall Council is part of a FutureSocial a regional programme funded by the Department of Education innovation fund, **FutureSocial** is aimed at increasing the quality of social work practice within the West Midlands, with a particular focus upon recruitment and retention of high quality practitioners. In addition, FutureSocial has attracted central government funding to become part of the National Assessment and Accreditation System (NAAS) phase 2 implementation, which will provide funding to develop regional and local CPD opportunities for all staff to reach the Knowledge and Skills standards for the Child and Family Practitioner roles, this is a standard that all our social workers will need to achieve in order to be able to practice in the profession at an agreed point in the future. Further work is required with the FutureSocial programme board to develop the regional offer from which Walsall can map and provide the needs of our local Social Workers from across the service and ensure that they are equipped to meet the required standard for endorsement and accreditation.

3.12 Clear Career Pathways for Social Workers have been established through consultation with current staff at all levels, to enhance the mobility of individuals and provide clear goal setting and aspirations for all. The development of a comprehensive Early Professional Development offer for social workers in year 2 and 3 of their social work journey, in line with the ASYE programme is welcomed, and will provide the platform for the development of specialist roles in the future and we hope will reverse the trend of increased departure from Walsall Childrens Service at this stage of their career.

3.13 Secondments have been made available where managers have identified potential to develop staff to the next level of practice, particularly to the roles of Senior Practitioner, Assistant Team Manager and Team Manager. These secondments are reviewed at the six-month point to decide whether the secondment should become permanent. In practice, this has been viewed as a positive win/win situation for the practitioner and manager as both are able to trial the new role and responsibility with additional support and development opportunity, and the majority of secondments have converted into a permanent appointment.

3.14 A market supplement was introduced in 2016 for Social Workers and managers working within the Initial Response Service and continues to be reviewed annually. **Financial Incentives** are being considered to reward loyalty of social workers and maintain experienced practitioners at the frontline in those areas of the service where retention is most problematic. The Recruitment and Retention group will continue review a range of incentives for social workers; to include retention payments, payable following a period of continuous service, for example 3 years. It is important to balance the impact of making payments to a specific group upon the morale and value that this has on the rest of the social work establishment. Therefore, these decisions need to be well evidenced and with clear rationale communicated to the whole service.

3.15 Feeling valued by the organisation

3.16 In Walsall, we are committed to showing our workforce that they are valued and capturing their voice through a range of fora. We will ensure that feedback is acknowledged and taken account of in developing our future plans. These include:

- The **Social Work Healthcheck** is an annual opportunity to engage with Social Workers across the Service;
- **Service Development Days** are held every two months and led by the Group Manager for that service. They are an important opportunity for staff to connect within their service and take time to reflect upon their performance. They are well received by staff and well attended as a result.
- **Staff Engagement sessions** are held on a bi-monthly basis on current topics that have relevance for our wider workforce, facilitated by the Principal Social Worker. It is also an invaluable forum to enable communication from frontline staff to the Leadership Team. These sessions have been temporarily focused upon engaging staff from across the Directorate in the Transformation programme.
- **Celebrating Practice Events** are held annually to celebrate the quality of practice across Early Help and Children's Services. They are an opportunity to recognise the achievements of Social Workers in successfully completing their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment; their Practice Educator Awards, the Owning and Driving Performance Programme and Going the Extra Mile Certificates. These events are well received by staff, whereby they feel valued for their dedication and achievements.
- **Research Projects/Teaching Partnerships** Social Workers and Managers are actively encouraged to become involved in regional and national research projects to develop their learning and our understanding of our local practices, eg. Nuffield Foundation – repeat removals of children from fathers.
- **Staff Conferences** are held annually to engage the whole Directorate in developing our culture and practice. This year's focused upon consulting on our Vision "Right 4 Children" and Transformation agenda.

4 Recommendations:

4.1 We need to continue to promote Walsall as an attractive and rewarding place to work as a social work profession through:

- Endorsing the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Action Plan in January 2019
- Implement and drive forward the components of the action plan; continuing our recruitment initiatives and with a clear focus upon improving our retention initiatives

- Promoting Walsall as a progressive and innovative Local Authority through national forums (What Works Centre, Nuffield Foundation) and regional initiatives (Teaching Partnership, FutureSocial and Principal Social Worker forum).