

Education & Children's Services

Agenda Item No. 7

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

15 February 2018

Title of the Report : The recruitment and retention of social workers

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor A. Nawaz - Children's Services & Education

Executive Summary:

Walsall's RISE priorities include the creation of a 'skilled and stable workforce'. This is core component of our continued journey of improvement in getting to Good. Our current Recruitment and Retention Strategy outlines the activities that we have mobilised in order to achieve this aim. The table below illustrates our projected figures for the reduction of agency social workers over the duration of the plan 2016 - 2020. We have already made significant progress against the projected figures, through the implementation of the initiatives outlined in the report below, which will return a sustained pool of newly qualified social workers. This will allow our focus to be upon the retention of highly skilled social work practitioners.

Financial Year	2016/2017	2017/2018 at beginning of April	2018/2019	2019/2020
Establishment	123.5	146.5 – additional 23	146.5	146.5
ASYE	27	25	25	25
Experienced social workers	61.5	66.5	80.5	94.5
Agency	49	55	41	27

Reason for scrutiny:

To consider a report on the recruitment and retention of social workers in the Children's Services Directorate.

Recommendation:

That:

The Committee notes the progress to date against the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Background papers:

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2016-2020.

Resource and legal considerations:

The continuation of the Market Supplement in the Initial Response Service has ongoing financial considerations for the Local Authority but it is outweighed by the positive impact of a stable, permanent workforce at the 'front door' of Children's Services.

Citizen impact:

Having a stable workforce, means that children, young people and their families do not experience unnecessary changes of social worker. Frequent changes in social worker will impact upon any individual's confidence in that professional and their ability to invest in that relationship. Having a stable workforce will enable the Council to focus our training and development programme to enhance the knowledge, skills and abilities of our permanent workforce, in turn providing better quality services to support children, young people and their families.

Environmental impact:

None identified.

Performance management:

The recruitment of social workers has improved significantly through the introduction of new initiatives and the attraction of our ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) programme. The availability of performance data to support this is limited as the permanent employee system and our agency worker system are not aligned. Equally our structures and numbers of social workers have changed over the last few years which makes year on year comparisons difficult to achieve.

Human Resources are working with the Children's Performance Team to develop an automated scorecard to identify trends, patterns and data with regard to vacancy rates and turnover.

Equality Implications:


Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out? No.

Consultation:

There has been no required consultation activity on the preparation of this report or as part of the scrutiny exercise.

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1. Context:

- 1.1 The provision of high quality social work services relies upon a well-trained, supported and motivated workforce. However, a shortage of experienced child and family social workers is evident across the country. Child and family social work is further challenged by high turnover and vacancy rates and a heavy reliance on agency staff as demand for permanent, experienced workers significantly outstrips supply.
- 1.2 In Walsall, we have experienced the most difficulties in recruiting and retaining permanent social workers in our front line teams who interface most with service users. Those teams are located within the Initial Response Service (IRS), Safeguarding and Family Support Service (SFS) and Corporate Parenting Service (CPS). In addition to this, we have encountered historical difficulties in recruiting to management posts within the IRS and more recently with the increased number of Team Managers in SFS and the departure of two Team managers in CPS; we had become increasingly reliant upon agency managers in these teams, too. However, recent recruitment activity and succession planning within these services has had a very positive impact upon the number of permanent managers now in post.
- 1.3 Professional structures generated through social work reform are widely felt to be contributing to a higher quality of newly qualified staff entering the profession. If these workers are to develop into the experienced practitioners that are currently in such short supply, employers need to build the organisational cultures required to support, retain and reward workers to stay in this emotionally and intellectually challenging profession.
- 1.4 Research conducted by the Guardian and Community Care magazine indicate the main factors influencing the decisions social workers make when making job applications:
 - Location is a primary factor – social workers wanting to give something back to a specific community
 - Reputation of the Local Authority
 - Training and Development Offer available
 - Management arrangements
 - Salary was only identified as important in a fifth of individuals surveyed

In terms of retention the most important factors were identified as:

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

2. Focus of the current recruitment and retention strategy

- 2.1 Walsall faces a number of current challenges, and to secure continued improvement we need to engage value and enthuse the unique contribution of all employees. We recognise that our success as a directorate is totally dependent upon the commitment and dedication of the talented people who work here. This strategy sets out our key priorities and how we will continue to value and develop our people in order to maintain our success in the future and mark ourselves a beacon directorate for practice in Children's Services.

We will do this by focussing our activities around four key commitments:

- To be an employer of choice
- To create capacity
- To be a developer of people
- To promote strong leadership and management for the future

2.2 Walsall Children's services' primary concern and commitment is to ensure that there is sufficient staff, with the right level of skill and experience, in the right posts to ensure the delivery of a high standard of service to the children, young people and families in the borough. The current employment and development package has been developed and communicated as a 'Total Rewards' package to demonstrate that, despite a challenging financial environment, Walsall Children's Services continue to offer a very positive offer. This will also contribute to increasing capacity by retaining good workers. The 'total rewards' package includes a competitive rate of remuneration, excellent training and development programme, good working conditions, supportive management arrangements, visible and responsive leadership.

2.3 Walsall has invested significantly in developing Restorative Practice across Children's Services to promote a cultural shift in engaging with children, young people and their families. In order to work restoratively social workers will be given the time and space to work directly with families and develop meaningful impactful relationships. They are being supported to achieve this by having a manageable work load, clear guidance and evidence based tools to use, robust and insightful supervision and a comprehensive learning and development programme.

3. Investment in Social Work posts

3.1 There has been significant investment by the council in increasing the numbers of social workers within Children's Services. A decision was taken as part of the 2016/17 budget setting process to provide additional investment of circa £2.1m to support the children social care workforce in Walsall. A further £1m of funding was then provided during 2016/17 to support an increase in the number of social workers within the Safeguarding Family Support Service aimed at reducing caseloads so that social workers could spend more time working directly with children and families.

3.2 As part of the 2017/18 budget setting process and following a further review of the children social care workforce, a total permanent investment of circa £3.5m, increasing to £3.9m in 2018/19 was approved. This additional support has financed the creation of 14 additional Senior Practitioner roles in April 2017. It will also ensure that the necessary management capacity is in place to support the increased establishment. The management arrangements within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service, Corporate Parenting Service and Children with Disability Team were remodelled with the deletion of the Assistant Team Manager position, an increase in the number of Team Managers and the re-introduction of the Senior Practitioner role. This provides clearer lines of management and accountability, smaller supervisory ratios and additional capacity to provide development, mentoring and coaching. This has been in response to feedback from staff and audit findings.

4. Recruitment Initiatives:

4.1 Walsall Council have delivered a number of initiatives to attract newly-qualified and experienced social workers to Walsall as detailed below:

4.1 Final year social work students are prioritised for placements within the frontline social work teams to introduce them to the authority and encourage them to apply for a permanent post with Walsall. Upon successful completion of their placement, they are fast-tracked to interview panel, rather than having to pass the assessment centre which tests their written and analytical skills as these skills have already been demonstrated as part of their placement. Four of our five final year students were recruited at the conclusion of their degree in July 2017.

4.2 The Return to Social Work Programme is an initiative that Early Help colleagues have piloted. The scheme seeks to employ qualified social workers, who want to return to a statutory social work role, within Early Help to undertake a valuable 'Research and Duty Officer' role on a twelve-month contract. The expectation is that these workers are re-introduced to a social work role in a supported, gradual process within their year of employment and enabled to make a successful transition to a qualified role. There are six Research and Duty Officer posts, with five currently being occupied. The current post holders came into post between August and November 2017 and are approaching the six months stage, when they will have a career conversation with the Principal Social Worker to map their transition into a social work post. Once we have agreed the social work service that they will transition to, they will start to shadow that service, one day per week, increasing incrementally, with a view to them taking up a social work post in that service when their 12 month contact ends.

4.3 The Step Up to Social Work (SUTSW) is a fast-track social work qualification programme, in its 5th cohort in the West Midlands region. Walsall has taken part in the SUTSW programme since the 3rd cohort and has incrementally increased the number of students that take part in the programme, to the current figure of six. This cohort commenced their social work training in January 2018 and will conclude their degree in March 2019 when they qualify as social workers. Upon completion of their degree, they are automatically offered a social work post in a front-line team. In Cohort 3 (completed in 2015), Walsall had four SUTSW students, only three completed their degree, one withdrew from the programme. None of these students had selected Walsall as their first choice authority and travelled a significant distance to their placement. They all chose to find employment with a local authority closer to their home. In Cohort 4 (completed in 2017), Walsall had five SUTSW students, all of completed the programme and qualified as social workers. All five remain employed by Walsall Council, one in Initial Response Service, two in Safeguarding and Family Support Service, one in Corporate Parenting Service and one in the Children with Disabilities Team. They are currently completing their assessed and supported year in employment.

4.4 Frontline is a fast-track social work qualification programme, similar to SUTSW. Frontline is a national programme that has been recently introduced in Walsall as part of our recruitment strategy. We currently have eight participants who

commenced in September 2017 and will qualify as social workers in September 2018 and take up posts in Safeguarding and Family Support Service. They are required to remain employed by Walsall for a year following their qualification, as part of their contact with the Frontline programme.

4.5 A market supplement was implemented within Initial Response Service for experienced social workers, Assistant Team Managers and Team Managers in June 2015 and continues to be in place. The decision to only apply the market supplement was made as the number of applications and recruitment rate to IRS was significantly lowered than other areas, e.g. Safeguarding and Family Support. The market supplement equates to £4,000 for social work posts, £6,000 for Assistant Team Manager posts and £8,000 for Team Manager posts. This has had a positive impact upon the recruitment and retention of permanent employees, whereby the number of agency staff employed in those teams reduced from 25 (at its highest) in July 2015 to 14 in December 2016 and 12 in April 2017. The number of agency social workers remains at 12 currently out of a total of 30 social work posts. During the same period the number of permanent managers has increased from 2 to 10, and will be fully staffed by permanent managers by March 2018. This is a significant achievement.

Recruitment Activity:

4.6 Walsall has attended the Birmingham Compass Recruitment Fair in March for the last 2 years. It has been an incredibly successful forum for Walsall to attract newly-qualified social workers to apply for a permanent post in Walsall. At the last Compass event, we received 202 expressions of interest from potential candidates registering with our talent pool. This converted into 31 successful applications for posts, being placed across Children's Services.

4.7 A comprehensive functioning Children's Service Recruitment microsite was developed to attract candidates to apply and work for Walsall and has been live since October 2016. Feedback from the induction programmes held in September and December 2017 for new starters, indicated that the microsite had a significantly positive impact on their decision to apply for a post here. In particular, they referred to the personal testimonies of current staff as authentic, realistic and passionate about making a difference to children and young people.

4.8 The aim of the recruitment microsite was also to facilitate a simplified route for experienced social workers to apply for permanent positions within the Council. This is achieved through the submission of a CV and a response from a council officer within 48 working hours. Upon review of the CV, if the candidate was deemed suitable an interview would be offered within 7 working days. This has had some success with the appointment of several posts across the service at all levels, including the conversion of agency staff to permanent employees, e.g. MASH Team Manager. The introduction of the IR35 for agency staff has also had a positive impact upon our conversion of agency to permanent worker.

Impact of Recruitment Activity:

4.9 As a result of these initiatives the Council has been able to recruit high numbers of newly qualified social workers, attracted by the high quality of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) Programme which we provide. This is a comprehensive year of development, including teaching sessions, reflective learning sets, direct observation, assessment, review and feedback. Regionally, our reputation for the quality of the programme has led to a high numbers of ASYEs applying for posts. Our most recent campaigns attracted in excess of 70 applications. In September 2017 we recruited 16 ASYEs and 6 experienced social workers and in December 2017 we recruited 12 ASYEs.

4.10 The ASYE programme in Walsall is a rolling programme, therefore cohorts cross years. For ease of analysis the figures are based on numbers completing (or not submitting as predicted) by year not by cohort.

Completion year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number registered	19	12	8	17	33
Number passed	16	10	6	13	
Number left before completion	3	2	1	4	2
Number Failed	0	0	1	0	
Retention @ 1 year	16 (100%)	6 (60%)	4 (66%)	13 (100%)	31
Retention @ 2 years	10 (62.5%)	4 (40%)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Retention @ 3 years	6 (37.5%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

5. Retention Initiatives:

5.1 We are developing a 'Grow Your Own Scheme' within Children's Services that supports unqualified permanent employees to be able to qualify as social workers whilst retaining their employment benefits, including salary. To date, two unqualified workers from Early Help and Social Care have been sponsored to complete their social work degrees through the Open University and Stafford University. They will both qualify as social workers in June/July 2018. As sponsored employees, they are tied in to work for the Council for two years post-qualification. The expansion of the apprenticeship scheme to include the degree in social work will enable the Council to further support the development of unqualified employees. We are planning to sponsor three employees each year on the apprentice scheme, with the same tie in on remaining with the Council for two years. Research has shown that employees that are offered career development opportunities through such schemes tend to demonstrate greater loyalty to their authorities, having felt valued by their employer.

5.2 All social work staff are able to access a comprehensive programme of Continuous Professional Development (CPD). 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. The active promotion of the Practice Supervisor and Practice Educator qualification provides social workers with the skills necessary to offer students a learning opportunity. This is a role that most social workers wish to pursue.

5.3 Within our current Recruitment and Retention Strategy, there is commitment to a caseload promise for social workers practising within IRS, SFS and CPS. Twenty three additional posts were created in order to create sufficient capacity to reduce caseloads for the social workers in these service areas. By providing a manageable, achievable caseload for social workers, they would be able to promote positive change for children and young people. Initially the maximum caseload for ASYEs was set at 15 children, whilst the maximum caseload for SWs following their ASYE year was set at 20 children. Caseloads were anticipated to be reduced further to achieve 12 cases per ASYE and 15 for post ASYE across SFS and CPS by December 2017. There has been significant success in achieving this in CPS, as the figures below demonstrate. In SFS whilst there has been progress towards this figure, it remains an area of real challenge. The average caseload across the service currently stands at 18.4 children. The range of average caseloads across SFS is between 16 and 21 children, whilst in CPS they range between 13 and 16 children. The notion of a numerical cap to a caseload does not always reflect the level of complexity and therefore we are considering replacing the promise with ‘manageable caseload’. The level of skill, experience and competence of the individual social worker would then be matched with a caseload that reflects their skill set and capacity.

5.4 The Unit model has been introduced across the service. They were initially introduced to the local authority by Frontline, when they are used as a weekly forum to discuss the children and young people with whom the unit are working. Unit meetings were launched within Children’s Services across Social Care and Early Help in February 2017. They were initially piloted within the Corporate Parenting and Early Help Service with all service areas adopting the model from April 2017, to create and embed consistency, cohesion and positive working culture. The purpose of the unit meetings are to:

- facilitate time and space for the team/unit to come together:
- build upon the team’s ‘restorative’ culture
- plan for the week ahead
- develop shared understanding of work children young people and families within the unit
- undertake a temperature check to ensure there is good support and a safe environment for practice
- improve communication throughout the service
- drive and embed the performance culture
- reflect upon practice, through case discussion/thematic reviews
- explore how our values influence our practice

5.5 Walsall Council’s Leadership Team have championed supervision as one of the key ingredients towards our achievement of children and young people being “safe, happy and learning well”. The introduction of the initial and now

revised supervision compliance reporting tool has demonstrated to all managers the importance 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 has provided clarity of expectation and standards to which all Managers need to aspire.

5.6 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. 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. Equally, the “peer to peer” support enables managers to practice their coaching with a peer and also be coached themselves. Performance coaches are also in place to embed this practice and further develop the skills of the managers. This, combined with the restorative approach of “high support, high challenge” is seeking to provide the framework within which good social work practice can develop.

5.7 The Council is also investing in the Firstline Programme, a leadership programme aimed at developing good managers into ‘great managers’. For our first cohort we are going to support four managers on the programme with a view to supporting all our Team Managers to participate in this programme. 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.

5.8 Other local authorities have introduced schemes such as ‘golden hellos’ to attract new employees and retention payments to encourage employees to remain with their current employer.

For example:

- West Berkshire Council is offering a new enhanced support package for social workers includes a paid sabbatical and £15,000 retention bonus after three years service.
- Cumbria Council offers ‘a generous recruitment and retention incentive payment of £10,000 on top of the Council’s excellent relocation package. This will be paid in two instalments - one at 3 months and one at 12 months provided you remain in an eligible post. It is repayable if you leave the role within 3 years of appointment’. The success of such schemes appear to be marginal, as it is acknowledged within the research, financial remuneration is not the most significant factor for social workers in making decisions regarding their employment and choice of employer.

5.9 Walsall’s basic salary scales compete well regionally in relation to all levels of social work appointment, ASYE through to senior practitioners, and management roles. It is unclear at present what the likely impacts of having two Children’s Trusts operating within the region will be Birmingham and

Sandwell. There has been some concern from their current employees as to potential changes to their terms and conditions and this resulted in the loss of a number of staff.

6. Success to date (as at 31 January 2018):

6.1 The table below illustrates the current SW staffing establishment with the frontline children's teams (IRS, SFS including Children with Disabilities Team and CPS). Walsall Council currently have 42 agency SW's this is progress in the area of recruitment and retention of SW has far exceeded the projected recruitment profile outlined in the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, which set a target of 55 agency staff by April 2018. We currently have 34.6 ASYES's employed which far exceeds the project recruitment profile which set a target of 25 ASYE's by April 2018.

	Team Managers				Assistant Team Managers/ Senior Practitioner				Social workers			
	Establishment	Permanent	Agency	Uncovered	Establishment	Permanent	Agency	Uncovered	Establishment	Permanent	Agency	Uncovered
Safeguarding and Family Support (SFS)	10	8	3	0	10	3	7	0	70.5	49.5	22	2.5
Initial Response Service (IRS)	3	3	0	0	4	4	2	0	30	16	10	4
Corporate Parenting Service (CPS)	3	2	3	0	4	4	0	0	35	22	8	5
CWD	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	1	11.0	6	3	2

Overview:

	Current As of 31 st January 2018	Target 2017/2018 beginning of April
Agency social worker	42	55
Permanent social workers	93.5	N/A
Experienced permanent social workers	58.9	66.5
ASYE	34.6	25

6.2 These figures are currently calculated manually and need to be available through the creation of a performance scorecard, which can include the demographic overview of the workforce, trends and patterns of recruitment and turnover and the level of experience (number of years) and expertise (qualifications) held across the service.

6.3 The recruitment incentives to date will convert into an addition 15 ASYEs in September 2018 without any additional recruitment. They will be made up of our 8 Frontline participants, 5 Return to SW employees and 2 staff members that have been sponsored by the Local Authority. Further cohorts of Frontline, Return to SW and SUTSW will continue to yield a continuous supply of ASYEs. Our challenge going forward is retaining them within the Council.

7. Forward Plan:

A continued focus on the stabilisation and development of the management tier to provide the conditions and environment for good social work practice to flourish, through the delivery of:

- Regular, consistent, reflective supervision
- Modeling and embedding restorative practice
- Manageable caseloads
- Responsive and comprehensive Continuous Professional Development

The current Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Action Plan will be revised and updated to take account of this focus and align with the new Corporate Workforce Strategy.

Access to the Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2016-2020 is available; please contact Lisa Harris and a copy will be supplied.

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