

Corporate Parenting Panel

25 January 2019

Strategies to Stabilise Social Work Teams



Report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides a summary of the strategies which have been put in place with the aim of stabilising social work teams.

Executive summary

- 2 The recruitment and retention of Social Workers has been a key priority following the 2016 Single Inspection Framework (SIF) inspection. Strategies have included:
 - (a) Introducing a Social Work Academy to support Newly Qualified Social Workers in their first year of practice.
 - (b) Enhancing pay for experienced Social Workers in “hard to fill posts” and reducing incentives to take up or remain in agency posts.
 - (c) Active recruitment, both within and outside the North East.
 - (d) Working to create the conditions for effective social work practice. This includes introducing LiquidLogic as a case recording system and Signs of Safety as our model of practice.
 - (e) Increasing capacity, both in frontline social work teams, and in posts which provide valuable support to those teams such as supervised contact.
 - (f) Actively listening to Social workers across the Service and taking appropriate action.
 - (g) Ensuring career development opportunities are available for Social Workers at all levels, to both support retention and develop the next generation of managers.

- 3 It is too soon to evaluate the impact of recent investment to increase capacity, however there have been some positive effects from strategies in place for longer:
 - a) The vast majority of Social Workers eligible for additional allowances have remained in post since the introduction of the allowances.
 - b) Team Manager and Social Work Consultant posts are much easier to fill than they were in 2016. In addition the age profile has changed so that 66% of Team Managers and 89% of Social Work Consultants are now aged under 55.
- 4 Despite these strategies there are continued challenges:
 - a) Turnover of less experienced Social Workers (not eligible for additional allowances) in Families First teams remains high.
 - b) Recruitment of experienced Social Workers into Families First remains low. Since June 2018 only 2 external candidates have taken up post in Families First teams.

Recommendation(s)

- 5 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) Note the contents of this report.
 - (b) Request an update on the impact of recent investment to increase capacity in 6 months.

Background

- 6 Under the governance of the Raising the Bar group, a significant amount of activity has been undertaken to systematically address issues of social work recruitment and retention, particularly in Families First teams.

Social Work Academy

- 7 The Social Work Academy was created in 2016 to allow the service to support a much greater number of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) through their first year in practice.
- 8 The Academy has now supported 48 NQSWs through to successful completion of the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), and is working with 24 NQSWs. It is anticipated that 21 NQSWs will start work with the support of the Academy in early 2019.
- 9 With the support of recent investment 12 new Enhanced Practitioner posts are being created to provide additional mentoring and support to

NQSWs in their teams. To date 4 successful candidates are undergoing pre-employment checks, further interviews are scheduled

- 10 The Service has retained 77% of the Newly Qualified Social Workers the Academy has supported since 2016. Where Social Workers have chosen to go elsewhere at the end of the ASYE they have been attracted by higher salaries or different types of work.
- 11 Since November 2017 Newly Qualified Social Workers have received an increment to their salaries on completion of the ASYE.

Pay

- 12 Social work pay and conditions are compared regularly across the region. As a result in June 2018 a £2,500 temporary recruitment and retention allowance was introduced for “hard to fill” posts (currently Team Managers, Social Work Consultants, Enhanced Practitioners and Senior Social Workers in Families First).
- 13 The allowance appears to have had a positive impact on retention. Since June 2018 only 2 individuals have left post after receiving the allowance. Both went to posts elsewhere in the Service in line with their career aspirations and have repaid the allowance.
- 14 The allowance has had an impact on recruitment to eligible posts. Since June 2018 only 2 Senior Social Workers and 1 Team Manager eligible for the allowance have commenced in post. 3 Enhanced Practitioners and 2 Team Managers eligible for the allowance are undergoing pre-employment checks.
- 15 There are indications that the allowance has been a demotivating factor for some Social Workers in posts which are not eligible.
- 16 In July 2018 agency rates across the region (with the exception of Together for Children in Sunderland) were capped to reduce costs and make agency working less attractive. There are indications that permanently employed social workers are less likely to move to agency employment, and a small number of agency workers have taken permanent posts.

Active recruitment

- 17 Active advertising through North East Jobs has been supported by both a recruitment pack clearly outlining Durham’s offer and FaceBook posts.
- 18 In October 2018 an agent was commissioned to identify 10 experienced social workers to join the service on permanent contracts. To date this has not led to any interviews or appointments.

- 19 Work has been undertaken to increase awareness of Durham as an employer in the region and nationally including:
- (a) Representing North East social work employers at Compass jobs fairs in Birmingham, Manchester and London.
 - (b) Publishing positive articles in the local press, and an advert in Compass: the Annual Guide to Social Work and Social Care (a publication delivered to 30,000 qualified social workers).

Creating the conditions for effective practice

- 20 Strategies intended to create the conditions for effective social work practice should also support recruitment and retention by making Durham a more positive place for social workers to work. Key projects are:
- (a) Replacement of the SSID system by LiquidLogic (February 2019), alongside lean reviews to streamline activities.
 - (b) In April 2018 the Service started to embed Signs of Safety as the model for practice.
 - (c) In July 2018 a new system of collaborative audits was introduced, making practitioners, children, young people and families central to the audit process.
 - (d) A new system to make policies and procedures clearer and easier to find for practitioners went live on 10 December 2018.
- 21 Team Managers and Social Work Consultants play a critical role in creating the conditions for effective social work practice. To support managers with this task training is provided through:
- (a) The Strengthening managers programme which was launched in 2016 with the aim of supporting managers to bring the best out of and empower their staff, focus on the child and family, and focus on quality and practice improvement. 55 of the managers in Children's Social Care staff have completed the programme. A further cohort is scheduled to commence in Spring 2019.
 - (b) 7 managers have completed the Firstline leaders programme since 2017, and a further 3 are undertaking the programme.
 - (c) In Autumn 2018 3 nominations were made for the Department for Education's practice supervisor programme. The nominees are expected to undertake the programme in 2019.

Increasing capacity

- 22 From April 2017 the Council made available additional resources, which included an additional Families First team in the East of the County, 4 Social Workers in Child Protection teams and 6 Social Workers in the Looked After Teams.
- 23 In August 2018 an agency team was commissioned to work with 180 children until February 2019. This contract has now been extended to July 2019 and the number of social workers in the team has been increased to increase the number of children the team can support to 252.
- 24 In November 2018 Corporate Management Team committed significant additional funding to create additional Social Work posts, as well as support posts to meet the demands on the Service.
- 25 Recruitment to these posts is being actively managed by the Senior Management Team, Human Resources and Finance.

Engagement

- 26 The senior management team are committed to actively listening to Social Workers across the Service, and taking appropriate action. Activities such as Practice weeks, Practitioner briefings and Consultation groups have all been held which provides an opportunity for the senior management team to be made aware of practitioner views and also actions needed to be taken to support staff retention.

Career Development

- 27 As a large local authority, Durham is able to offer Social Workers career development opportunities not as easily available elsewhere. These are designed to support the retention of experienced workers, and encourage the next generation of managers.
- 28 The professional development offers for both social workers and managers were substantially revised and circulated in June 2018.
- 29 In March 2017 a revised progression process was launched, which recognises and celebrates a Social Worker's competency to work consistently at a higher level of responsibility with more complex cases.
- 30 In June 2018 the title "Senior Social Worker" was introduced to reflect the skills, knowledge and ability of post-progression Social Workers.
- 31 We encourage all of our Social Workers who have 2 years of post-qualification experience to consider becoming practice educators, providing social work students with valuable workplace experience. An

allowance of £10 per placement day is paid to on-site practice educators.

- 32 An aspiring managers programme was launched in 2016 to support social workers at any level to move into the next level of management. Of the 6 aspiring managers who joined the programme in 2016, 5 were successful in moving to the next level of management. Of the 13 aspiring managers who joined the programme in 2017, 6 have so far been successful in moving to the next level of management.

Conclusion

- 33 It is too soon to evaluate the impact of recent investment to increase capacity, however there have been positive effects from strategies in place for longer:
- a) The vast majority of Social Workers eligible for additional allowances have remained in post since the introduction of the allowances.
 - b) The aspiring managers programme has been successful in encouraging internal progression. Team Manager and Social Work Consultant posts are much easier to fill than they were in 2016. In addition the age profile has changed so that 66% of Team Managers and 89% of Social Work Consultants are now aged under 55.
- 34 Despite these strategies there are continued challenges:
- a) Turnover of less experienced Social Workers (not eligible for additional allowances) in Families First teams remains high.
 - b) Recruitment of experienced Social Workers into Families First remains low. Since June 2018 only 2 external candidates have taken up post in Families First teams.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None

Finance

The Council has invested significantly to increase social work capacity since 2016.

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

The strategies put in place to improve recruitment and retention of social workers, in particular in Families First teams have had some success. Turnover of social workers eligible for the retention allowance is extremely low, and internal progression has improved substantially. However turnover of less experienced social workers not yet eligible for the retention allowance is much greater, and recruitment of experienced social workers from elsewhere has very limited success.

Accommodation

None

Risk

Inability to recruit and retain social workers remains a risk, and is included on the corporate risk register.

Procurement

Procurement support has been sought in line with contract procedure rules.