


## REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

**11 September 2017**

<b>Subject:</b>	Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	Councillor Simon Hackett - Cabinet Member for Children's Services
<b>Director:</b>	Executive Director of Children's Services – Jim Leivers Service Director Children and Families – Vince Clark
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Exempt Information Ref:</b>	
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### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:**

1. Consider the progress that has been made in recruiting and retaining Children's Social Workers
2. Recommend that this work is ongoing as part of the Children's Improvement Plan

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To give scrutiny an update on the recruitment and retention measures within Children's Social Care

## **2 IMPLICATION FOR THE COUNCIL'S AMBITION**

- 2.1 It is essential for the children of Sandwell that Children's Social Care is seen as an 'employer of choice' to ensure that all the required resources are in place to provide a robust and professional service to families and children in need.
- 2.2 It is also one of the Commissioners seven improvement priorities that the Council increases the social care workforce to ensure that caseloads within the service are manageable to allow good social work practice to flourish.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The ongoing improvement of Children's Social Care is reliant upon having the right staffing resources in place.
- 3.2 It has been recognised that there has been insufficient numbers of Social Workers within the service and the establishment has therefore been increased.
- 3.3 It is important that these roles are recruited to with appropriately experienced staff as soon as possible, alongside managing and retaining the existing workforce.
- 3.4 Agency Social Workers have assisted with peaks in workload to keep caseloads at an appropriate level and are essential while permanent recruitment takes place and is embedded.
- 3.5 This report details the ongoing actions in relation to both recruitment and retention

## **4 THE CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 The employee offer for Children's services includes pledges relating to Case Load, Technology, Work Environment and Supervision. There is also a comprehensive package around professional development and wellbeing. The Council has committed resources to increase the establishment numbers of qualified social workers in Children's Services by 30 to 184. The service has therefore implemented a major recruitment

campaign to cover this shortfall and also to replace the high turnover of staff that has been experienced in recent months.

- 4.2 The availability of experienced Social Workers is not an issue unique to Sandwell MBC, with many neighbouring LA's experiencing this same pressure. The current recruitment plan for Children's Services related to 4 specific strands of activity;
1. Ongoing open recruitment activity through the Sandwell Children's Services recruitment portal - 59 appointments were made in the first 6 month of 2017.
  2. To supplement the ongoing open recruitment process, a dedicated recruitment partner (Sanctuary) have been appointed to undertake a targeted campaign to recruitment of 45 experienced Social Workers and 11 Team Managers by the end of November 2017.
  3. Implementation of a dedicated volume recruitment campaign for agency staff to provide 15 social workers to the service immediately whilst the permanent recruitment of staff is implemented.
  4. Recruitment of 20 newly qualified social workers to start in the service before the end October 2017.
- 4.3 The turnover of experienced Social Workers is higher than desired but a number of initiatives have been put in place to try to combat this including professional development through the L&D offering, and career progression through the F to G process and Aspire management course. The service promotes CSC learning and development opportunities including the online resource, *Research in Practice*.
- 4.4 Data from exit interviews is also collated to inform as to why people are leaving and what can be done to address this. The key themes related to staff leaving have related to issues such as high caseloads, working long hours, poor levels of support and the physical conditions staff work in. All of these issues have been substantial resolved through the implementation of actions to meet the seven service improvement priorities set out by the Commissioner. This has led to improvements and enabled all staff to have good IT kit/smart phones to facilitate agile working, staff will move to new office accommodation in early 2018 as part for the Children's Trust arrangements, social worker supervision levels are now at 90% and caseloads are starting to reduce as new staff have been recruited.
- 4.5 In order to retain newly qualified staff 2 merit increments are awarded upon completion of their ASYE programme. Preparation for progression to a Band G Social Worker then forms part of their professional discussion in supervision.
- 4.6 The quality of agency staff including their commitment to remain in the service has been a concern for us. To this end a dedicated agency has

been engaged to provide experienced Social Workers to the service. In the few weeks that we have been working together, we have recruited 11 SW's into the service (4 have taken up posts and a further 7 are in pre-employment checks), against a target of 15. Further interviews are already planned during September 2017.

- 4.7 The need for an appropriate work life balance for the health and wellbeing and staff has been promoted by the service. New technology has mean that staff are now able to work more agilely and do not have to return to their office base. The message that flexible working (including where appropriate home working) is to be encouraged has been circulated to all staff. In addition, flexi time has been re-introduced across all areas of the service and should assist staff in the management of their time and their caseload – giving staff flexibility around start and finish times and also giving visibility for managers about the hours that are being worked.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 Focus groups have been held with staff. All staff that leave the service are offered exit interviews with responses collated to identify common themes. Trade Unions are kept fully informed on measures being taken around recruitment and retention of staff.

## **6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 Consideration has been given to monetary incentives such as 'golden hello' or 'golden handcuff' payments which are paid to staff upon commencement of role and those already in post which in order to tie in their employment with us for a specific period (usually 3 years). Evidence from other local authorities has demonstrated limited success with this option. There are also concerns here around affordability and the integrity of the Sandwell MBC pay and grading structure. Regular reviews of pay and reward package compared with neighbours are undertaken.

## **7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Additional resources have been made available in order to pursue the recruitment and retention initiatives detailed above

## **8 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 None

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 All HR policies and processes are adhered to regarding the recruitment and retention of staff

**10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

10.1 None

**11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

11.1 None

**12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

12.1 None

**13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

13.1 None

**14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

14.1 None

**15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

15.1 While progress is being made in this area, it is essential that this continues to be a focus for the Council and that the approaches above are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are fit for purpose and to identify any new initiatives that would also support the service.

**16 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

16.1 None

**17 APPENDICES:**

None

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