



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 3rd December 2020

Subject: Recruitment and Retention of Children and Families Social Workers

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the current progress in the recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers and the challenges of recruiting and retaining Experienced Children and Families Social Workers during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
1. To note the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Children's Services recruitment and retention of experienced Children and Families Social Workers.
 2. To identify any further recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 The recruitment and retention of experienced frontline Children and Families Social Workers is a challenge facing all local authorities across the country. The most recent DFE Social Workforce Workforce Data indicates (2019) that there is an acute shortage of Experienced Children and Families Social Workers particularly those who are three years post qualified. The operating environment for the recruitment of experienced social workers has become increasingly challenging since the pandemic.
- 3.2 Childrens Services has worked extensively to ensure that the recruitment and retention of Children and Families Social Workers is a key strategic and operational priority. This is driven by a comprehensive Children's Services Workforce Development Strategy 2020/21, overseen by the Director of Children's Services.
- 3.3 The Workforce Development Strategy supports and improves the recruitment and retention of social workers, and children's services practitioners by developing the training and development offer, focusing on improving the capability of staff to engage children, young people and families by enabling them to assess, make judgements, decisions and 'hold risk' whilst creating solutions with families and multi-agency partners.
- 3.4 The strategy has delivered a number of key initiatives:
- A number of Recruitment Campaigns to promote Coventry City Council Childrens Services as a first-choice destination for Social Workers to practice.

- A successful Coventry Social Work Academy has seen 58 Newly Qualified Social Workers commencing the Academy since July 2018.
- A revised Children's Services Social Work Progression and Career Pathway Framework
- A Children's Services 'Grow our own Social Work Scheme' and National Fast Track Pre-Qualifying Social Work Programmes; Step Up and Frontline programme.
- The service has supported the 'Social Work Together' government campaign supporting the current COVID-19 pandemic enabling social workers who have retired in the last two years to be fast tracked to apply to return to practice.
- A return to practice scheme to enable Children and Families Social Workers to return to the profession.
- A comprehensive learning and development Offer that is fit for purpose and supports practitioners to continuously improve the services provided to children and young people and their families, that improves the quality and consistency of practice.
- The launch of a 'refer a friend' scheme in March 2020 has resulted in a further 3 experienced social workers joining the service.
- Regular engagement with agency staff to consider applying for vacancies within the service has resulted in a number of agency social workers being appointed to permanent experienced social worker roles.
- Children's Services launched their own local Induction in October 2020 to support the corporate Induction. This is held on a monthly basis.

4 Impact of Covid-19 on Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

- 4.1 Coventry experienced a significant number of staff self-isolating because of Covid-19. Initially, the number of staff infected increased, leading to significant capacity issues that impacted on the Council's ability to effectively respond to all safeguarding issues. Good agency staff were in short supply and did not compensate for service pressures, the negative impact on frontline staff therefore increased.
- 4.2 Children's Services continued to ensure that the recruitment of social workers remained a key priority, this included being part of the DfE initiative focused on the returning to practice recruitment campaign *Social Work Together*.
- 4.3 The service continues to have a robust recruitment process that specifically targeted recruiting experienced children and family's social workers through a range of social media platforms, recruitment campaigns and other innovative approaches. Recruitment interviews have continued during this period virtually via Microsoft Teams.
- 4.4 The service is under significant pressure, the current market and demand for social workers continues to increase due to the pandemic which has increased the competition for recruiting within the region.
- 4.5 The number of social work vacancies remains high, and despite a range of recruitment initiatives and other approaches, the service continues to interview small numbers of candidates on a weekly basis and those successful are offered experienced social

worker roles. The COVID-19 pandemic is having significant impact on recruitment and is making it difficult to recruit experienced social workers during this period. This has led to an increased use of agency staff and increased financial impact.

- 4.6 During the period 1 April – 30 September 2020, 35 staff left social worker qualified roles compared with 35 in the period 1 April 2019 – 31st March 2020.
- 4.8 The service is also experiencing difficulty in recruiting agency social workers due to insufficient experienced social workers in the region. A shortage of social workers has led to higher caseloads and higher demand of work across all of the services and teams in Children’s Services.

5 Recruitment Campaign to Recruit Experienced Social Workers

- 5.1 Over the last 12 months there has been a targeted and focused campaign aimed at the recruitment of Experienced Children and Families Social Workers. This has included local, regional and national advertising.
- 5.2 The table below illustrates the number of social workers who have commenced Children’s Services since April 2020. This includes 11 Newly Qualified Social Workers who commenced the Social Work Academy (Cohort 6) in September.

	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Grand Total
Starters	2	2	2	3	3	18	6	36
Leavers	4	5	7	8	3	4	4	35
Net	-2	-3	-5	-5	0	14	2	1

- 5.3 The total number of agency staff has increased each month, however in October this reduced slightly to 58 compared with 63 in September, this is a result of a recruitment of experienced social workers during this period.
- 5.4 Work continues with agency permanent suppliers to encourage agency staff to convert to permanent roles.
- 5.5 The Director of Children’s Services has personally written to existing agency staff to consider permanent roles within Children’s Services outlining the benefits and career opportunities available. All existing agency staff have also been invited to a recruitment webinar to highlight the vacancies available and why Coventry Children’s Services is a good place to work.
- 5.6 Social Work Today is an online platform developed by Compass, it has been developed to give professionals a sector-specific platform that creates the networks and links to provide social work information. Children’s Services currently have a number of social work vacancies advertised with Social Work Today, two of the vacancies have been featured as job of the week which is seen on most pages of the website as well as on the e-shot and have featured two jobs as featured jobs which is seen in most places of the website.
- 5.7 The service continue to advertise and recruit via a number of social media platforms, the Guardian have recently published an editorial about the Social Work Academy Team Manager’s progression with Coventry, the promotional article links to the microsite pages where all Children’s Services Social Worker opportunities are advertised. The editorial has also been promoted across all other social media platforms, including twitter; Facebook; LinkedIn and the Social Work Today website to ensure maximum coverage.

<https://www.theguardian.com/coventry-city-council-childrens-services/2020/oct/20/there-is-no-them-and-us-culture-here-how-a-new-model-helped-transform-coventrys-social-work-academy>

- 5.8 A new campaign has been launched to recruit a further 12 Newly Qualified Social Workers (Cohort 7) to commence in January 2021, this is an additional cohort to address further the number of social work vacancies within the service. There have been 79 applications for the next intake into the academy.

6 Coventry Social Work Academy

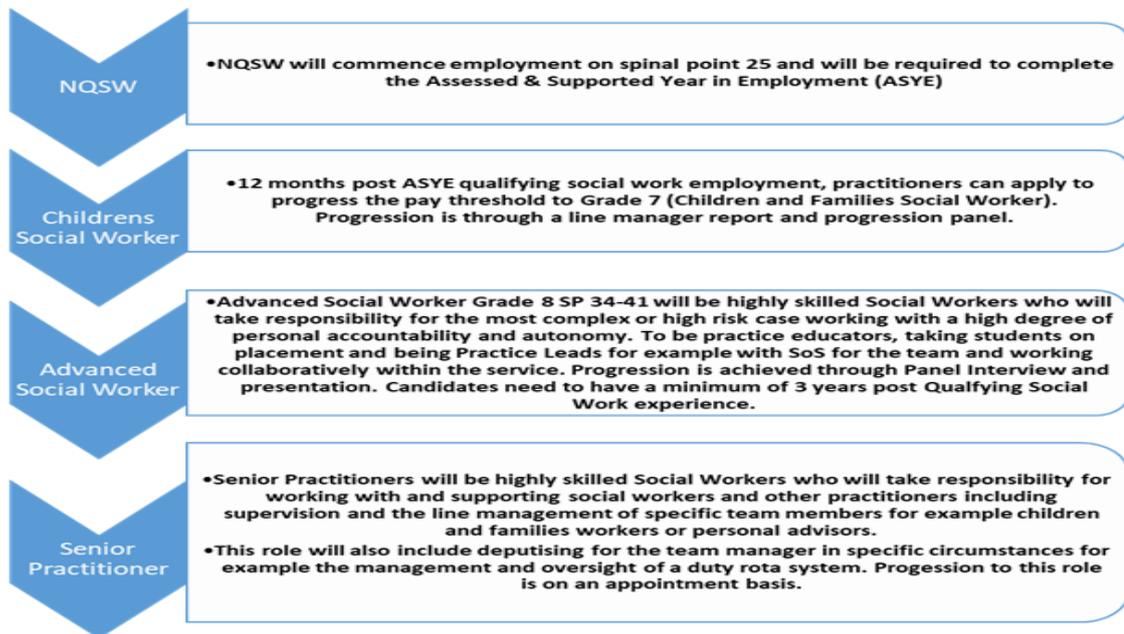
- 6.1 The Coventry Social Work Academy provides support to newly qualified social workers into the service. The academy received a national award for innovation and was recognised for outstanding practice in the Guardian Public Sector Awards in November 2019.
- 6.2 Coventry's Social Work Academy offers Children and Family Social Work Practitioners a pathway through their career with Coventry Children's Services, by creating an environment which supports stability and continuing professional development.
- 6.3 Coventry's academy aims to provide a highly supportive environment, where NQSWs can develop their practice with reduced caseloads; building upon their skills, knowledge and values gained in their qualifying courses; bridging the gap between Student Social Worker and NQSW, by modelling, coaching and teaching best practice; supporting NQSWs to enter their teams outside of the SWA, confident and competently, whilst recognising that at this stage they are still NQSWs, in their Assessed and Supported Year of Employment.
- 6.4 The academy has seen the recruitment of 58 Newly Qualified Social Workers into the Academy since July 2018.
- 6.5 54 of the Newly Qualified Social Workers have remained in post and benefitted from the progression scheme, and continuous professional development offer. This initiative has contributed to the retention of Social Workers.
- 6.6 A further cohort of 11 Newly Qualified Social Workers commenced in the academy in September 2020.

7 Childrens Services Social Work Progression and Career Pathway

- 7.1 Coventry City Council's vision is to recruit and retain fully confident and highly capable Social Workers, who have the required knowledge and skills. The scheme provides a career and professional progression pathway from Newly Qualified Social Worker to Experienced Social Worker and Advanced/Senior Practitioner roles.
- 7.2 At the heart of the progression framework is a pathway that places an emphasis on rewarding social workers for their competency and professional skills and knowledge in practice.
- 7.3 The progression scheme recognises the increasing contribution and professional responsibility Social Workers are expected to develop at the different stages of their career and the central importance of incentivising and retaining experienced social workers in direct practice.
- 7.4 The development and support of Social Workers has clear benefits for children, young people and their families in terms of the experience, knowledge and skills that will be available to them.

7.5 Achieving better outcomes for children and young people is at the heart of our career progression pathway, which motivates and rewards front line staff whilst retaining their expertise within front line teams.

7.6 The progression Framework pathway is highlighted below:



8 Childrens Services ‘Grow our own Social Work Schemes’

8.1 At the heart of the recruitment strategy has been the investment in ‘grow your own Social Workers’.

8.2 Coventry has supported 6 Children and Families Practitioners to undertake and complete the qualifying Social Work Degree through a programme of partial sponsorship with the Open University; Aspiring to Social Work. The participants in this programme have qualified and will be entering the Social Work Academy in January 2020.

8.3 In partnership with Coventry University 17 Children and Families Practitioners are currently being supported to undertake the Social Work Degree Apprenticeship. This is a 3-year programme which will see the first cohort of 10 qualify in 2022; and the second cohort of 7 complete in 2023.

8.4 There will be further intakes onto the successful Social Work Degree Apprenticeship in 2021, and 2022. This will provide a further 10 places.

8.5 Childrens Service are members of the West Midlands Step Up To Social Work programme. This is a DFE supported Post Graduate Pathway which aims to ensure that students undertake and complete the qualification and enter the workforce within 14 months. Childrens Services have benefitted from 12 Newly Qualified Social Workers over the last 2 years who have successfully commenced employment.

8.6 The Frontline Programme is a government led funded pathway that provides the opportunity for high potential university leavers and career changers to train and qualify as Social Workers within 2 years. Childrens Services have been members of the programme for the last two years which has seen 8 Newly Qualified Social Workers commence employment.

- 8.7 The Frontline scheme has been extended in 2020 with a further participant's joining the scheme; this will lead to an additional 8 Newly Qualified Social Workers commencing employment with Childrens Services in September 2021.
- 8.8 The West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership is led by Coventry City Council; this partnership is focussing on supporting improvement work across the regional Universities and Local Authorities.
- 8.9 Childrens Services supports Social Work Student placements within the teams, offering statutory placements. This activity supports and promotes Coventry as an employer of choice and destination for Social Workers.
- 8.10 Childrens Services have been successful with the local, regional and national schemes to support the supply and workforce planning for Newly Qualified Social Workers over the last 12 months.
- 8.11 The annual Children and Adults Services Practice Week has continued to support the learning and professional development for Social Workers. This year's week was delayed due to the pandemic. The week during November has continued to support and promote Coventry City Council as an employer that is committed to learning and promoting the professional development of Social Workers.

9 Retention

- 9.1 During the last 12 months the service has continued to focus on recruiting and retaining experienced Children and Families Social Workers across Children's Services to ensure a sustainable workforce. This has included a strategic focus on recruitment with a regional and national campaign to promote Coventry City Council as an employer of choice for Children and Families Social Work; implementing and promoting further the work of the Social Work Academy; Implementation of the Social Work Progression Scheme offering social workers the opportunity to progress to Advanced Social Worker roles and the Professional Leadership and Development Pathway for Social Workers and Team Managers.
- 9.2 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the stability of the workforce. Children's Services have adapted and made changes to the way the service deliver the workforce and development priorities. During the year, recruitment and selection interviews have been held virtually via Microsoft Teams and learning and development has continued to be undertaken virtually via e learning and a number of Webinars.
- 9.3 The Children's Services Workforce Development Strategy outlines a number of ways the service is currently supporting retention, this is illustrated in **Appendix 1**.
- 9.4 A package of emotional wellbeing and support has been provided to Childrens Services Social Workers, this include mindfulness; relaxation and yoga. This compliments the support that has been provided by the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service.

10 Overall Summary

- 10.1 The service is experiencing significant pressure with the increase in demand as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it remains a very challenging operating environment.
- 10.2 The service is reaching a level of work that is becoming very challenging, with caseloads increasing, a shortage of social workers, and high levels of vacancies have resulted in increased numbers of agency staff, with an agency market that is shrinking. The system is under extreme pressure. All of this is leading to a budget pressure.

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Appendix 1

The table below illustrates what Children's Services are continuing to do to retain Social Workers.

What are we doing to retain Social Workers?		
Providing a robust induction programme. To identify the support staff can expect to receive; clarify expectations relating to behaviours, standards and code of conduct; promote awareness of key policies and procedures; identify key	Maintaining an in-house Approved and Supported Year in Employment through the Social Work Academy with support, coaching and mentoring and supervision from	Delivering thematic workshops for Experienced Social Workers with group and peer support from Professional Practice Educators.

What are we doing to retain Social Workers?

<p>contacts with whom staff will work and from whom they can access support.</p> <p>A new local Children's Services induction was launched in October 2020 to support the Corporate and Manager Induction processes.</p>	<p>Professional Practice Educators, a reduction in caseload and study days to complete a portfolio.</p>	
<p>Providing Continuing Professional Development Programmes and career opportunities for all staff, underpinned by an appraisal and regular supervision.</p>	<p>Promoting Research Informed Practice and Learning and Development through an Annual Practice Week.</p>	<p>Well Being and Emotional Support provided to staff through range of services provided by Health and Wellbeing Services which includes Well Being Week and Employee Assistance Programme.</p>
<p>Developing a range of development programmes for Social Workers/Advanced Social Workers/Senior Practitioners/Team Managers.</p>	<p>Promoting the internal transfer process for experienced social workers to request a transfer to another team to develop further their experiences.</p>	<p>Reviewing employee benefits to extend further the benefits offered.</p>
<p>Providing opportunities for staff to access the Council's corporate 'Grow Our Own' initiatives, such as the 'Aspiring Leaders Programme' and 'Future Leaders Programme'.</p>	<p>Providing access to Research in Practice and Knowledge and Research Hubs to promote continuous learning and development.</p>	<p>Embedding the Social Work Standards for Employers and an annual Health Check to identify issues and areas for development and change.</p>
<p>Promoting new opportunities and vacancies to all staff within Children's Services to support the Progression Framework.</p>	<p>Offering a comprehensive Benefits package reviewed and updated on an annual basis – see below.</p>	<p>A Corporate Employee Assistance Programme launched in April 2020 to provide support to all staff during the current Covid-19 pandemic.</p>