



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

23 November 2023

Subject: Social Worker Recruitment and Retention – Workforce Proposals

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children’s Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the Social Worker Recruitment and Retention – Workforce Proposals, implementation and progress to date.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children’s Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
- 1) To note the current progress
 - 2) Identify any items to look at in more detail on the work programme 2023-24
 - 3) Identify any recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 Recruitment and retention of social workers is a national problem and accepted in the government’s response to the Independent Review of Social Care. The workforce profile over the past few years has led to Children’s Services supporting a “grow our own” approach, with a key focus on enabling social workers into the profession and developing into experienced social workers with high quality practice standards.
- 3.2 The local picture in Coventry in many ways mirrors the regional and national picture. Coventry has continued to face challenges to recruitment and retention of social workers, which has impacted the stability of the workforce and the number of agency staff required to cover vacancies. Coventry is based within the West Midlands, in an area where there are a number of local authorities all competing for the same pool of social workers, which makes it a competitive market for social workers.
- 3.3 Coventry Children’s Services vision for the Social Work workforce is to secure a stable, permanent, highly skilled and capable workforce; a workforce who are able to uphold the One Cov values of Coventry City Council, working in the ‘The Coventry Way’ – the children’s services practice approach informed by signs of safety, relational and restorative practices. A stable and permanent workforce can more effectively work with children, young people and families in a way which supports to improve outcomes.

3.4 The service is progressing a range of positive recruitment and retention initiatives to help recruit and retain Social Workers further and reduce the number of Social Worker vacancies. The initiatives include:

- The Review of Team Managers, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) and Child Protection chairs pay in order to bring in line with regional rates of pay.
- Retention Payments to experienced Social Workers until end of March 2024, replaced with a Progression pathway for experienced social workers the opportunity to progress to Advanced Social Workers through a progression panel process to be implemented from 1 April 2024.
- Continuation in the expansion of the Social Work Academy supporting more Newly Qualified Social Workers to grow experience in the service and fill vacancies on a more permanent basis.
- Introduction of clinical supervision in response to staff working on/with critical incidents and to support staff to remain well in work.
- Bespoke Well-being weeks and monthly wellbeing days to promote and support the wellbeing of staff.
- Recruitment evenings with opportunity to meet the stars of the Kids TV programme- and the young people.
- Return to Practice Programme-paid opportunities to support re-registration with Social Work England.
- Increase in the number of Social Work apprenticeships offered.
- Continuation of the workforce planning for future social workers through working with fast-track qualifying programmes alongside the traditional university routes.
- Building upon the relationships with local universities stronger partnerships to develop good quality Newly Qualified Social Workers for the service.

4 Recruitment and Retention

4.1 To build stability within the workforce and reduce the number of social workers leaving, experienced social workers are offered a retention payment. The retention payment of £3,000 is payable to social workers who have completed 12 months service from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, payable in their March salary. New Social Workers who are appointed after 1 April 2023, receive the retention payment on completing 12 months service from their start date, this will be replaced by a Progression pathway for experienced social workers the opportunity to progress to Advanced Social Workers through a panel process to be implemented from 1 April 2024.

4.2 The retention payment offer was put in place as an interim measure from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, to be replaced by a progression pathway for experienced social workers to be implemented from 1 April 2024. The opportunity of a retention payment and progression pathway is supporting the retention of experienced social workers who want to live and work in Coventry, reducing the reliance on agency social workers.

4.3 To encourage experienced social workers further, two recruitment Open Evening events were held in May and September 2023 this year. The event was branded under the TV documentary "Kids" theme and was extensively promoted through various social media platforms and endorsed by Social Work Today. Marketed as an informal networking opportunity, the event showcased colleagues who featured in the Kids TV documentary, alongside several young people. Attendees had the chance to engage with the team, explore career opportunities, and participate in on-the-spot interviews for permanent Social Worker positions.

- 4.4 As a result of the recruitment events and branding the service successfully appointed eight experienced social workers. The event not only facilitates recruitment but also strengthens the Council's relationship with key stakeholders.
- 4.5 Team Managers, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) and Child Protection Chairs have been regraded, following a benchmarking exercise that identified a difference in the total salary paid to equivalent roles in the marketplace. Through the job evaluation process, the outcome supported the re-grade. The impact of the regrading is making a difference and has reduced the number of vacant team managers over the last twelve months, as well as appointing a permanent LADO.

5 Return to Practice programme.

- 5.1 The return to practice programme was launched in 2020 and offered a CPD and shadowing programme to support practitioners where registration has lapsed to return to the profession, allowing social workers to obtain their Social Work England re-registration. This was not a paid scheme for candidates but provided applicants the opportunity to complete the programme on a flexible basis to suit their availability.
- 5.2 The programme has since been developed to stay competitive within the regional offer and since 2022, Coventry launched a 12-week full time programme, offering candidates an opportunity to work as a children and families worker at a G5 salary whilst collating evidence to support their re-registration, and an opportunity to interview and be recruited as a full-time social worker.
- 5.3 The programme launches a recruitment campaign every 6 months to recruit up to 8 return to practice social workers. 4 Return to Practice social workers have been recruited into social work positions within the last 12 months. 2 have remained in Children's Services and 2 decided Adults Social Care was their preference and left the service. The programme now recruits on a rolling basis.

6 Progression pathway for Social Workers

- 6.1 The implementation of a progression pathway for experienced social workers to progress to an Advanced Social Worker replaces the current retention payment from 1 April 2024.
- 6.2 Advanced Social Workers are highly skilled and take responsibility for the most complex, or high-risk work with children and families, doing so with a high degree of personal accountability and autonomy. The role also includes supporting team members through mentoring, coaching and advancing the expertise and professional competence and confidence of others.
- 6.3 The current progression framework required social workers to wait for a vacant Advanced Social Worker position to become available prior to applying. The progression pathway provides experienced Social Workers the opportunity to progress by evidencing their competency at Advanced Progression Panel to become an Advanced Social Worker.
- 6.4 The new updated progression pathway launches in December 2023, social workers who meet the criteria for progression and can demonstrate a range of competency will

be invited to attend an Advanced Social Worker Progression Panel, the panels will be held in January and February and those successful will progress from 1st April 2024.

- 6.5 The new progression pathway provides the opportunity for additional 41 FTE experienced Social Workers to be able to progress by evidencing their competency at an Advanced Social Worker Progression Panel rather than waiting for vacancies to become available.

7 Expansion of the Social Work Academy

- 7.1 The Social Work Academy launched in 2018, to date the Academy have recruited 190 newly qualified social workers into the service. A total 17 cohorts of newly qualified social workers have completed the Social Work Academy ASYE programme, with 83% of new qualified social workers successfully progressed to work in various service areas within Children's Services.
- 7.2 There has been a total of 66 newly qualified social work leavers since 2018, some of which could not complete the programme and some that left post ASYE. This is a 65% retention rate over the duration of 5 years, which averages to a 2.8-year length of service based on the 'grow our own' programme. This is a strong retention rate. Coventry's Social Work Academy ASYE Programme is well renowned for its robust and innovative offer to newly qualified social workers, which has attracted candidates nationally to relocate to Coventry as a city to live in and practice. In 2019, after a short period of the programme being launched, the Social Work Academy won the Guardian Public Service for best 'Workforce Learning and Development'.
- 7.3 Social Work Academy supports Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWS) to grow and develop their skills, capabilities and competencies. The Academy expanded from one team to two teams, to provide stability and attract new social workers to Coventry. It has enabled staggered cohorts of Newly Qualified Social Workers into the service, as a strategy to build a permanent, stable workforce whilst reducing spend on agency social workers across a medium-term strategy. Currently, financial Year 2023/4 will bring 52 qualified social workers into children services at 4 entry points, with two support teams to safely adopt this approach.

8 Introduction of Clinical supervision

- 8.1 Research into the social work/caring profession has shown that burnout and stress has led to an increase in sickness levels in the workforce. This has also shown to affect productivity in the workplace and therefore has an impact on children and families and the ability to form meaningful, professional relationships as part of the work.
- 8.2 The Principal Social Worker has responded to the ask for 'clinical supervision' from social workers who have cited the pandemic and the increased complexity of managing the work as the rationale behind the requests as factors impacting their wellbeing.
- 8.3 Clinical supervision is also a feature of discussions in various regional meetings which link to the regional workforce and has been discussed by the West Midlands Teaching Partnership, Principal Social Worker network and the regional Workforce Workstream. All recognise this area needs to improve for the profession.
- 8.4 Clinical supervision is the process of reviewing and monitoring a practitioner's work patterns and responses to enable and increase their skills to seek strategies and

solutions in relation to their work and practice, in order to provide clients/children and families, the optimal quality of service possible and to prevent harm from occurring.

8.5 A pilot for a six-month period was agreed to consider impact and response to critical incidents and long-term sickness or frequent short-term absences. During the pilot 11 employees were referred. The findings confirmed:

- *Most referrals had positive impacts from having engaged in the clinical supervision. This was mainly regarding work life balance and stress management techniques to help them feel better able to cope in the workplace and develop better self-care routines at work such as taking regular breaks.*
- *The majority expressed benefits in terms of being able to re-evaluate and apply more personal self/care down-time, feeling that they could better recognise their personal limitations and emotional triggers and felt that they could improve their ability to become more organised. The supervision also helped them to take time to reflect on their experiences and process their feelings.*

8.6 The service believe good quality clinical supervision will have a positive impact on staff retention and lower sickness rates. The recommendations from the pilot will be considered and pilot extended until March 2024 to agree and embed further a clinical supervision offer for staff in Children's Services.

9 Staff Wellbeing

9.1 To improve retention and maintain a stable workforce, Children's services launched a Wellbeing Week offer in November 2021 to take place every 6 months in conjunction with Occupational Health. The programme encouraged colleagues to take care of their wellbeing, and to reflect on health and mental issues by attending different seminars, group activities and workshops designed to be informative and raise awareness.

9.2 A total of 4 wellbeing weeks have taken place, delivering a total of 54 various seminars, activities and sessions for colleagues to attend and take part in. A total of 537 colleagues to date have registered to take part in Wellbeing Week.

9.3 The feedback has also been very positive amongst colleagues who have joined Children's Service from different authorities, stating that their previous authority had never invested in their workforce like Coventry has with programmes such as Wellbeing week.

10 Overall impact – Workforce Stability

10.1 In October 2022, Children's Services experienced significant workforce pressures, with the high turnover of staff and high level of vacancies and difficulty in recruiting agency staff to cover vacancies.

10.2 To attract, recruit and retain a stable permanent workforce and to remain competitive in the market a number the workforce proposals implemented from April 2023 are helping to support and stabilise the workforce pressures.

10.3 In the last twelve months social worker vacancies have reduced significantly from 52 to 22.5. The number of agency staff covering vacancies is also starting to reduce from 28 to 22. The service continues to promote the benefits of working within the service, encouraging Agency workers to apply for vacancies.

10.4 The impact of the proposals to date are summarised below.

| | Vacancies as of October 2022 | Agency staff covering vacancies as at October 2022 | Vacancies as of October 2023 | Agency staff covering vacancies as of October 2023 |
|------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Social Worker | 22 | 12 | 8.5 | 10 |
| Advanced Social Worker | 17 | 12 | 12 | 10 |
| Senior Practitioner | 8 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Team Manager | 5 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 52 | 28 | 22.5 | 22 |

11 Next Steps

- 11.1 The service will continue to promote Children’s Services as a good place to practice social work and offer incentives and benefits to recruit and retain more experienced social workers.
- 11.2 As a **Good** authority, the service is proud that Ofsted recognised the achievements in supporting good outcomes for children and young people in Coventry, creating an environment where good social work practice can flourish.
- 11.3 The Children’s Services Workforce Development Strategy is aligned to the corporate People Plan, it outlines strategies to support and improves the recruitment and retention of children’s services practitioners, including through the training and development offer.
- 11.4 The focus is to improve the capability of staff to not only engage with children, young people and families well but also to enable practitioners to be able to assess and make decisions which are risk sensible whilst creating solutions *with* families alongside multi-agency partners. The core learning and professional development offer is mapped to the knowledge and skills statements and focuses on promoting the practice knowledge and skills of the children’s workforce and evidence to maintain Social Work England registration for social workers.

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