



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
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Recruitment & Retention – Children’s Social Care

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1. Introduction

The recruitment and retention of social workers is a key priority for the service. A stable social work workforce is important for a number of reasons including, consistency in social workers for children and families, stable teams which improves staff morale with workers feeling supported and safe at work, skilled staff who have received training on Shropshire’s systems and practice models and less of a reliance on agency social workers which come at a high cost to the local authority.

Nationally there is a shortage of social workers and like other local authorities Shropshire struggles to recruit to social work vacancies which is why the retention of social workers is as important as recruitment. Due to Shropshire’s location the pool of social workers available to us is not as wide as other local authorities across the West Midlands.

Through the Workforce Strategy for Children’s Social Care, there has been a commitment to ensuring Shropshire is a leading employer in the West Midlands. Shropshire have prioritised recruitment and are working on a number of work streams to improve our Market Place offer to Social Workers, including Senior Social Workers and Team Managers.

Recruitment of social workers is an on-going activity which is on the agenda of all Senior Leadership Meetings so that we can maximise all opportunities to recruit to vacant posts.

2. Current Situation

Since September 2018 we have had the following leavers;

Team Managers

Team Manager 1 – left to move to another local authority

Team Manager 2 – retired

Team Manager 3 – left for family reasons

This equates to 21% (3/14) of the Team Manager role.

All these positions were recruited to internally which is positive however this resulted in 3 Senior Social Worker positions becoming vacant, which were also recruited to internally, resulting in 3 social work positions becoming available. So, whilst social work progressions across the service is positive, it does create a lack of stability across the service.

Senior Social Worker

Senior Social Worker 1 – left to move to CAFCASS

This equates to 16% (1/12)

Again, this post was recruited to internally.

Social Workers

Social Worker 1 – Left for personal reasons

Social Worker 2 – Left to join the police

Social Worker 3 – left to work for another local authority

Social Worker 4 – left social work but remains as a Personal Advisor working with Care Leavers in Shropshire

This equates to 3.5% (4/112)

We are now seeing fewer social workers leave the local authority and we are successful at retaining social workers through either progression opportunities or through other opportunities across the service, for example additional posts that were created in Fostering and Adoption which were attractive to frontline social workers.

Although our leavers rate is relatively low, our vacancy rate due to workers moving across the service was higher than we would have liked (16%). Every vacancy is difficult to recruit to. Across the service during this period we lost a total of 7 experienced social workers. The recruitment of experienced social workers is a key challenge as we attract very few experienced workers into the local authority. This is why for Shropshire our recruitment strategy is focused on ‘grow your own’ social workers. We know that local social workers stay with us so we are keen to attract local students who we know will then stay with us when they qualify.

To this end Shropshire is participating in two graduate training programmes, Frontline and Step Up. This year 4 Frontline participants will be recruited as permanent social workers (August 19) and 3 Step Up students have joined the service (April 19). Going forward we are in the process of creating 8 Trainee Social Worker Posts with 8 local experienced unqualified workers having the opportunity to become qualified social workers. This will replace the Frontline scheme but Step Up will continue. This trainee programme will be in collaboration with UCS and utilises the National Apprenticeship Levy

In addition to this we have focused on the recruitment of new social workers. We have undertaken the following work to strengthen our recruitment campaign;

- Re-wording of advert
- Creating recruitment videos, including interviews with the DCS and frontline social workers
- Coverage in the Shropshire Star
- Social Media campaigns, Tweet's, Facebook, LinkedIn
- Job of the week – West Midlands Jobs
- Increasing student numbers across the service, to attract ASYE's
- Taken feedback from workers on benefits of working for Shropshire and included these in the advert.
- Published revised retention package.

This work has resulted in a significant increase in applications although again these are primarily from newly qualified social workers. Recruitment over the past 2 recruitment periods has been as follows;

March-May 19 Recruitment

During this period, we successfully recruited 15 ASYE's, Including 4 from the Front-Line programme, 2 from the Step-up programme and 7 new to Shropshire. We also recruited 1 experienced worker, seeking to relocate to Shropshire from Cardiff and 1 experienced worker reallocating from Australia, seeking to return to Shropshire. Plus we successfully converted 2 agency workers to permanent positions, both with a breadth of experience.

It is clear that our recruitment and retention strategies are working with fewer workers leaving the authority, although we have seen higher vacancies due to the amount of movement across the service which was created by Team Manager vacancies, increase in posts in adoption and fostering services and the creation of a 4th team in the Case Management Service. However despite a higher than usual vacancy rate our focus on recruitment and retention packages have enabled us to recruit more staff in comparison to previous years.

The key priority for the service is now retaining our social workers. The pay award for all Local Authority staff including social workers has made a real difference as we now have more comparative pay rates to other local authorities. We have also introduced retention payments for those teams which tend to have the highest vacancies and/or are difficult to recruit to. This includes the Assessment Teams, Case Management Teams and Looked After Children Teams. The retention payments are for workers that have been in post for two years and require them to remain with the local authority for a further 2 years. So far 22 workers have accepted this payment.

3. Conclusion

Current recruitment and retention strategies are proving successful with a reduction in social workers leaving the local authority and success in recruiting to vacant posts. However, the recruitment to any vacant social work post remains a challenge and the lack of availability of experienced workers at the point of recruitment is a risk to the local authority. We cannot run a service on newly qualified workers and this increases our reliance on agency social workers who bring the necessary experience to the service. The service is now stable and we should see less movement across the service over the next 12 months so it is hoped that we are entering into a period of stability over coming months, although with a total of 15 (13% 15/112) newly qualified social workers across the service, we will need to maintain a certain level of agency workers so that we can allocate our most complex cases.

We are confident that current strategies relating to ‘grow your own’ social workers will place us in a good position going forward, in the meantime the offer of a retention payment will secure key experienced workers with us for the next two years with the option to extend this further for an additional two years at the end of this period.

In conclusion we are in a strong position from both a recruitment and retention perspective, however there is always a vulnerability in the current climate with caseloads, capacity and work pressures at their highest levels. These are all factors that need to be taken into consideration when considering recruitment and retention of social workers and are areas that we are equally focused on.