

Children's Services Committee

Item No.....

Report title:	Recruitment and Retention – Social Workers
Date of meeting:	10 July 2018
Responsible Chief Officer:	Sara Tough Executive Director, Children's Services
Strategic impact The ability to recruit and retain social work qualified professionals to deliver services and outcomes for children, young people, and their families is critical. Understanding where our pressure points are and having strategies in place to mitigate them is essential. In considering strategies we have considered: <i>Prevent and reduce demand:</i> reshaping services to provide early help and reduce call on professional social work <i>Joining up work; done once and done well:</i> joint social work academy with adults for professional development focus, centralised recruitment and management of agencies through neutral vendor agreement <i>Being business - like:</i> clear view of costs and benchmarking <i>Data and evidence to target data:</i> improved workforce data and planning from one centralised source	

Executive summary

Following questions at the March committee about our social work workforce, this report has been compiled to advise members of our status, progress and continuing plans to ensure a stable and well-resourced workforce.

This report demonstrates improvements in increasing our social worker capability against a challenging workforce backdrop. Continuing to achieve a fully established workforce against this backdrop requires a different approach and cannot rely on recruitment as the solution.

In summary, our recruitment approaches are improving our overall permanent headcount, supported significantly by our newly qualified programme and we ensure a safely resourced service using agency workers.

Our strategy over the coming year, whilst still pursuing recruitment options is to remodel how social work provision is provided. This could be through a skills-mix approach or using multi-disciplinary professionals working in an integrated way with other providers, coupled with how we manage demand overall for services. Ultimately this will support a reduced agency reliance and spend and ensure we provide a consistent service for families without unnecessary or planned changes of social worker.

Specifically, the report provides an overview of the national picture in relation to recruiting and retaining social workers and how we bench mark to provide an overall picture of the current challenges.

The strategies to achieve a stable and well-resourced workforce include:

1. Recruitment plans including education routes into practice
2. Rebalancing the mix of permanent staff and agency workers
3. Improved Career development to support retention
4. Future thinking on the role of the social worker as an alternative to address skills shortages and manage demand of workload

To help inform our thinking we have visited Hampshire, Hertfordshire and other authorities to understand how they have transformed their services and identify elements that would work for Norfolk.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note the content

1. Current Picture

1.1 National insight and benchmarking

The recruitment and retention of Childrens' Social Workers is a national issue. The Department for Education has applied a new data methodology for 2017 to understand the national workforce picture and provide a new benchmark. (it should be noted that the data is considered experimental.) Details are provided at Appendix A.

The data indicates that we are increasing the number of employed social workers in the workforce *faster* than other Local Authorities and that our turnover in 2017/18 is lower than the national average. We remain reliant on agency workers as a key component of our workforce and although this is higher than the national picture, we are seeing a reduction in usage.

	National	NCC
Year on year (yoy) change in number of social workers employed	+3%	+10%
% vacancies	17% increase of 5% yoy	10% Decrease of 8% yoy
% turnover	15%	14%
Less than 2 years' service	34%	29%
Less than 5 years' service	58%	53%
Agency rate	16%	23%
% of agencies filling vacancies	75%	68%
Increase in agency usage yoy	0%	-14%

Additionally, qualitative feedback in the 2016 Local Government Association (LGA) survey of 91 authorities, over half of respondents identified recruitment as being in their top three risks across all services and 42% were 'not very' or 'not at all' confident about having enough social workers to meet demand over the following 12 months.

We have undertaken several County visits to understand other models of social work provision to consider alternative models including skills mix and multi-disciplinary working.

1.2 NCC workforce data (Social Work qualified roles):

The establishment (Budgeted roles FTE) was permanently increased by 66 FTE in 2015 in response to Ofsted recommendations. Below is a record of the workforce position as at June 2018:

Post				
	Established fte	Actual fte	Vacancies	agency
Social Worker	201.26	129.67	71.59	
Snr Social Worker	97.48	79.95	17.53	
Practice Consultant	33.88	20.41	13.47	
Team Manager	56	51.61	4.39	
IRO/LADO	17.7	16.5	1.2	
Sub Total	406.31	298.14	108.17	75.75
NIPE cohort		25.5	25.5	
Total Vacancies less agency	406.31	323.64	82.67	6.92

These figures include a temporary uplift in the establishment of 30FTE posts secured through transformational funding to respond to an increasing number of referrals into the system thereby reducing backlog and provide safe services.

For the year ending 2017/18, we demonstrated an improvement in our workforce with an increase of **26** headcount predominantly at Social Worker Level 1 (newly qualified), with a total of 44 leavers and 70 new entrants to NCC.

1.3 Workforce Plan for 2018/19

Assuming that as a minimum we maintain current recruitment activity, turnover stabilises at 12%, and the establishment reduces by the 30 posts in 2019, then the predicted impact on vacancy levels (without the benefit of agency staff) is shown in the table below.

	2018	2019	2020
Actual fte	298.14	298.14	
Established fte	406.31		
Vacancies	108.17	78.17	
NIPE Recruitment	50	50	50
Other recruitment	30	30	30
Turnover	-35.8	-35.8	
Total predicted fte	298.14		

The sections below, provide further insight of how we would seek to improve our recruitment capability, particularly considering a much-improved story to tell, and other organisational

strategies which can enable a faster flight path to reduce the agency reliance and cost associated.

2. Recruitment – Our Strategy

2.1 Experienced social worker recruitment:

Over the last 5 years, we have used recruitment marketing techniques in conjunction with Community Care to improve our visibility to encourage applicants to Norfolk. With our recent Ofsted findings and a newly stabilised leadership team, we have the ingredients to tell an increasingly positive story and make NCC a more attractive proposition. We will continue to work with Community Care as our agency provider and through use of advertorials, targeted emails and adverts provide a renewed focus on our recruitment campaigns. We are planning a Community Care Live event in September to continue to maintain our presence in the market with potential candidates. We are increasing our capability within HR to include permanent resource with a focus on recruitment marketing.

2.2 Newly qualified social workers:

Providing a route to qualification is and will continue to be the primary source to grow our workforce of qualified social workers. By October 2018, we will have recruited more than 200 Newly qualified social workers over 4 years, of which we have retained 148 (76%).

In 2014 we set up a more structured approach to the recruitment and training of newly qualified social workers (NQSW) with the creation of the Norfolk Institute for Practice Excellence (N.I.P.E.). This has proved a popular offer for those leaving university and in their most recent report, Ofsted noted that:

Strenuous efforts to build a stable, skilled workforce are beginning to secure positive results. Continued investment in Norfolk's Institute for Practice Excellence (NIPE) ensures good-quality support to newly qualified social workers when they start their employment in children's services. This programme has been effective in achieving a more stable workforce and is an example of good practice.

During initial training NQSW on the NIPE programme are not counted as part of the budgeted establishment because of the protected time needed to complete required learning.

Alongside the NIPE arrangements, we offer a number of initial training routes enabling individuals, including some of our own employees, to gain a social worker qualification under the umbrella of the Norfolk Social Work Academy. By providing trainees with work placements in our service we build a relationship with them which can be continued through the NIPE process and on into front line teams. Routes include degrees in Social Work through the UEA or OU, Social Work apprenticeships which come online in 2019, Frontline and the DfE funded Step Up to Social Work programme. We have also worked regionally on the LGA's Return to Social Work pilot. We will be taking the lessons learned from this and considering how we can develop our NIPE offer further.

2.3 Supporting the Future Pipeline:

Through the work of the teaching partnership we have three Practice Education leads who work closely with the UEA (and other local social work degree providers) and Team Managers to identify student placements to support practice development. The experience the student has in their placement is critical to their future career planning. Improving the quality of the placements we offer will encourage student social workers to join us as NQSWs. This is a significant pipeline into our NIPE recruitment.

NCC currently aims to provide placements for all locally-based students on any social work degree course. We provided **79** placements in the 17/18 academic year.

2.4 Use of Agency staff:

Children's Services	Average FTE over year
2015-16	65
2016-17	82
2017-18	72

Agency workers have played an important part in meeting our workforce needs and whilst agency working may be perceived as short-term and less reliable, we have secured agency workers for longer-periods of duration providing consistency and expertise. The number of agency workers in the market has remained static nationally at 16% and plays an important role to cover absence, and peaks of workload. It remains a key strategy to reduce the reliance on agency staff in line with our workforce plan targets. They additionally play a critical role as additional resource whilst newly qualified staff carry a reduced case load.

2.5 Managing Agency Costs:

We manage our recruitment through our neutral vendor contract with De Poel managed centrally in HR which allows us to better control independent agencies seeking to negotiate prices.

We are part of the East of England Memorandum of Co-operation which means that we have signed up to an agreed rate for each type of role and will not take on agency staff who have worked in a permanent role in the region in the past 12 months. This has helped us reduce the cost of agency staff and discouraged staff leaving permanent roles to become agency workers.

2.6 Converting agency staff to permanent employees

We have been successful in providing a new offer to encourage 15 agency workers to transfer to permanent status and support their relocation and training. This has been facilitated by the introduction of the IR35 regulations (whereby agency workers join the NCC IR35 payroll and are deducted tax and national insurance monthly). For those staff converting, the transfer to permanent status has been less impactful financially than historically was the case.

3. Career Development to support retention

We are successfully tracking the career progression of our NIPE cohorts. 29 (22%) staff from earlier cohorts have been successfully promoted as Social Workers, Practice Consultants or managers. This is a key component of retaining social workers who might otherwise move to other Authorities to secure promotion. The table below the progression of our early NIPE cohorts through to various levels of social work up to Team Manager level with 4 years of joining the organisation.

	2014	2015
Total cohort	39	57
Leavers	7	16
Internal moves to Adult Social work	4	1
Social Worker L1	0	0
Social Worker L2	6	28
Practice Consultant /Snr Social Worker	17	9
Team Manager	2	
Other	3	

We offer sponsorship for MA Social Work modules at the UEA as a key retention measure and support for improved practice and career development. We also encourage Practitioners to train as Practice Educators to support student workers with their workplace learning. We also encourage practitioners to become involved in supporting the UEA in their research and learning activities.

We are relaunching our Social Work Academy and are currently developing a job family framework that will support learning and career progression. Our social workers will understand the range of roles there are for them, here in Norfolk, and what they need to do to develop towards the role(s) they are interested in.



4. Future activity

- 4.1 We have refreshed our workforce data and reporting in order to publish monthly workforce data providing focus and priority to the workforce plan
- 4.2 We continue to refresh our recruitment marketing to publicise the positive change in our Ofsted rating and showcase Ofsted findings and how we are transforming our services.
- 4.3 We are currently reviewing the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) / Front Door arrangements the outcome of which would seek to reduce unnecessary assessments by social workers and therefore reduce workload.

- 4.4 Alongside this we are reviewing our frontline social work teams to explore different ways of working to allow social workers to spend more time with children and families. The changes resulting from these reviews have been shown in other authorities to allow a different mix in the social care workforce and **potentially** a reduction in the numbers of fully qualified staff we will need in the future and thereby reducing our vacancy gap and reliance on agency workers.
- 4.5 Some early research conducted through EELGA indicates that our salary ranges for experienced social workers may have fallen slightly compared to regional comparators. We will complete the review of market pay rates and provide any recommendations if required.
- 4.6 In September, we will be re-launching the Norfolk Social Work Academy across Childrens and Adults to lead the professional development of social workers (and occupational therapists) within the context of integrated services, and provide ongoing learning opportunities and development pathways for all Norfolk County Council social workers/occupational therapists to support our recruitment offer, promote development, improve practice and showcase our professions in Norfolk.
- 4.7 The opportunities presented through the new Social worker apprenticeship will be exploited and will form part of our workforce planning / service design.

5. Finance

- 5.1 We currently we have some AGREED commitments over establishment on our staffing budget and the intention is to address these through successful demand management which should, over time, reduce the number of qualified staff we need in the model.
- 5.2 We will be transforming the model to return the staffing spend to the current base establishment and budget.
- 5.3 We also have a significant current reliance on agency workers – cost of circa £1.7m – representing an opportunity to drive down costs by designing a new model which does not require this level of agency resource.

6. Issues, risks and innovation

Failure to recruit, motivate and retain social workers impacts on quality of service as clearly identified through national and local inspection regimes and reporting.

The delivery of a clear workforce plan, accurate workforce data and monthly performance reporting on progress will provide a clear route for improvement

Providing appropriate development support to enable newly qualified social workers to train with appropriate workloads and supervision requires an appropriate ratio of experienced to new social workers.

7. Background

The recruitment offer is provided in our recruitment microsite at www.norfolkbetterfutures.co.uk

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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