

# Audit Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Dorset County Council**



Date of Meeting	21 January 2019
Officer	Nick Jarman, Joint Director for Children, Adults & Communities
<b>Subject of Report</b>	<b>Recruitment of Children's Social Workers</b>
Executive Summary	<p>This report summarises the activity and outcomes over the past 12 months to recruit children's social workers.</p> <p>It considers also the associated issues affecting caseloads, continuity of care and cost pressures.</p>
Impact Assessment:  <i>Please refer to the <a href="#">protocol</a> for writing reports.</i>	Equalities Impact Assessment:  N/A
	Use of Evidence:  Within the body of the report.
	Budget:  The costs of children's services and in particular the cost of children in care are one of the most significant and hard to control costs for all top tier councils.  Having as full a complement as possible of experienced social workers and for social worker caseloads to be manageable can also be critical to the level of expenditure.  This report explains how new social workers have been successfully recruited over the last year and how improvements have been made to the manageability of caseloads themselves and more generally the effort made to make DCC an attractive employer in a market place for children's social work professionals which is highly competitive.

## Recruitment of Children's Social Workers

	<p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p> <p>Current Risk: HIGH Residual Risk HIGH</p> <hr/> <p>Outcomes:</p> <p>The outcomes aimed for by recruiting additional social workers was to make caseloads manageable. This aim has largely been achieved. As a consequence the number of looked after children has stabilised in DCC whereas in most councils they are rising.</p> <hr/> <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>As the report explains the number and permanence of social workers will affect the wellbeing of children who are 'open' to children's social care and the number of children looked after by the council.</p>
Recommendation	Members are asked to note this report.
Reason for Recommendation	N/A
Appendices	None
Background Papers	None
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## Recruitment of Children's Social Workers

### Recruitment of Children's Social Workers

#### 1. Context

- 1.1 In order to safeguard vulnerable children effectively, it is essential that social worker caseloads are manageable. This means that:
- Good quality work can be done with children and families
  - Social workers feel secure and are not overwhelmed by unmanageable, daunting caseloads
  - Experience shows that this is likely to reduce the number of children taken into care, which is massively costly (in all senses)
  - Social workers are more likely to be attracted to and remain with a service with manageable caseloads, as an employer of choice
- 1.2 Upon arrival in October 2017 the new Director for Children's Services made an unambiguous commitment, based upon his extensive experience elsewhere, to reduce frontline children's social worker caseloads to a manageable level (the ideal is 1 to 15).
- 1.3 By comparison, caseloads in neighbouring councils average 1 to 22, the highest being 1:30 and the range 1 to 15-30.
- 1.4 A report to Cabinet in late 2017 requested an extra £1m to recruit an additional 20 social workers, in order to reduce caseloads in the manner and for the reasons described above.

#### 2. Outcomes

- 2.1 In October 2017 the number of social worker vacancies covered by agency workers stood at 34. It is worth noting that:
- a) Agency social workers cost between £24k and £30k (depending on grade) more to employ than permanent social workers
  - b) Agency social workers may lead to discontinuity for children who are worked with. Frequent changes of social worker can prevent stable, productive relationships being formed
  - c) The market for social workers is a sellers' market where demand greatly outstrips supply
  - d) All Councils have social worker vacancies and depend to a greater or lesser extent upon agency workers
  - e) DCC is now considerably less reliant upon agency workers than its South West counterparts
- 2.2 At the time of writing the caseload average across children's services is 1 to 16.7. The range is 1 to 3.8 to 1 to 18.7.
- 2.3 During the period January 2018 to date the service has succeeded in recruiting 26 new social workers. In October 2017 there were 38 agency workers. This figure is reduced now to 18.
- 2.4 The service is currently holding 27.5 social worker vacancies. This is a deliberate tactic to anticipate the effects of LGR.

## **Recruitment of Children's Social Workers**

### **3. How Has This Been Achieved?**

- 3.1 From January 2018 an innovative, intensive recruitment campaign was set up. The efforts and talent of our own Comms Team need to be acknowledged here.
- 3.2 Some factors were critical to success. For instance:
  - We pitched our message on manageability of caseloads and a secure working environment
  - Imaginative use was made of social media
  - Prospects were followed up promptly and made to feel welcome
  - We shortened the line on recruitment with a 60-day target from interview to start work
- 3.3 We have restructured the assessment and case management teams. What were in January 2018 four area teams, have been compressed into two district teams; one East, one West.
- 3.4 We have not reduced the number of managers commensurately but have thereby reduced the ratio of workers to managers.
- 3.5 Until the Spring of 2018 social workers in the district (formerly area) teams held a mix of assessments and cases which are open and being worked.
- 3.6 A significant number of assessments which are nonetheless time-consuming, result in no further action. We found that the mix of assessments and open cases was tending to overwhelm social workers.
- 3.7 In the late Spring we introduced changes- Assessment Pods. This means that in District Teams, workers either do assessments or work open cases. This has taken much of the pressure out of the system.

### **4. Future Issues**

- 4.1 There is still work to be done. Much of this is around improving the quality and consistency of social work itself and supervision.
- 4.2 In the short term our most significant risk is that we do not lose social workers because of the LGR.
- 4.3 Provided that we do not, after April 2019 and for the first time in living memory, the children's social work establishment will be commensurate with the budget for it. This is a very sensitive, major risk.