

Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Dorset County Council



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| Date of Meeting | 30 th January 2018 |
| Officer | Nick Jarman, Interim Director for Children’s Services |
| Subject of Report | The Council’s Approach to Social Worker Recruitment and Retention |
| Executive Summary | This brief report has been submitted to provide the Committee with an overview of the approach and activities which have been put in place to ensure the delivery of our strategy for the effective recruitment and retention of social workers within Children’s Services. |
| Impact Assessment: <i>Please refer to the protocol for writing reports.</i> | Equalities Impact Assessment: N/A |
| | Use of Evidence: Within the report. |
| | Budget: None |
| | Risk Assessment: N/A 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: Current Risk: MEDIUM Residual Risk MEDIUM <i>(i.e. reflecting the recommendations in this report and mitigating actions proposed)</i> (Note: Where HIGH risks have been identified, these should be briefly summarised here, identifying the appropriate risk category, i.e. financial / strategic priorities / health and safety / reputation / criticality of service.) |

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| | <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>(Note: Please consider if any of the following issues apply: Sustainability; Property and Assets; Voluntary Organisations; Community Safety; Corporate Parenting; physical activity; or Safeguarding Children and Adults.)</p> |
| Recommendation | Members are requested to note the contents of this report. |
| Reason for Recommendation | In order to inform Members of the action being taken to recruit and retain children’s social workers, why it is so important and to explain the collateral benefits of the approach being adopted. |
| Appendices | Children’s Services Recruitment and Retention Plan |
| Background Papers | None |
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1. Background

1.1 The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) requested a report on social worker recruitment and retention.

1.2 This report relates to Children's Social Workers.

2. Context

2.1 For some years now Children's Services social work has become a "sellers' market". This is mainly because:-

- Demand for services has been rising
- Demand for Children's social workers exceeds supply
- The profession has become less attractive in the wake of e.g. Victoria Climbié, Baby P

2.2 The problem has become particularly acute for Councils located in areas where housing and living costs are relatively high.

2.3 Until recently also supply or the cost of supply was hampered by the number of social workers who were attracted to agency work. In Councils with significant vacancies, the need to employ agency staff can be £24K a year or more than a permanent worker. Agency work recently has become less attractive owing to IR35; which means that it is becoming slightly easier to recruit.

2.4 In terms of Dorset's situation, at the time of writing we have 20 vacancies plus cover for 18 staff on maternity or long term sick leave.

2.5 In terms of recruitment and retention money is not the exclusive attraction; as it is roughly the same everywhere. What matters most is the "offer". This means becoming the employer of choice. Because:-

- Caseloads are manageable
- Workers have the time to do the quality work with children and families that makes a difference
- Critically, social workers feel safe and supported
- Critically also, social workers tell their friends and colleagues elsewhere that this is a good, safe place to come and work

2.6 The benefits do not stop there. By a combination of attracting the best social workers and manageable caseloads, the time available for quality work with families will reduce the number of children being taken into care and on child protection plans. In turn, this will reduce the huge costs associated with looked after children.

2.7 Cabinet on 6th December approved £1M to employ another 20 social workers; deliberately to reduce caseloads and so forth, as described above. To help make us an employer of choice.

2.8 From 6th January 2018 the biggest, most sophisticated recruitment campaign for children's social workers, in its history. Not only must we have the right/best "offer" we must make sure our target market knows about our response to it.

- 2.9 As well as recruiting it is equally vital to retain social workers. To this end the Council has secured £2M of funding from the Department for Education to run the Reinvigorating Social Work Programme. This will mean that all social workers in tranches, will be coursed in order to refresh and deepen their skills.
- 2.10 It is also important not to forget the very important effect that recruitment and retention have upon the quality, consistency and responsiveness of children's social work services. Where there are extensive vacancies/agency workers continuity for children and families will be interrupted. For instance a child or family may see three or more social workers, which can be disruptive.
- 2.11 In addition we are developing and implementing:
- Sector specific job descriptions and person specifications
 - Improved career progression and a fast track programme for career development
 - Strategies to ensure that our caseloads are reasonable and that we provide a safe and supported working environment through high quality supervision and management

4. Assisted and Supported year in Employment (ASYE) Recruitment

- 4.1 We have been successful in recruiting ASYE Level 1 social workers who receive first class support during their first year with us, giving them a great start to their future career with Dorset Children's Services.
- 4.2 We have a career development pathway to progress from Level 1 to Level 2 on successful completion of the ASYE year.

5. Additional Frontline Resources

- 5.1 We are focusing our efforts in not only targeting talented and experienced people, but also increasing our baseline numbers. To this end, Members agreed an additional **£1m** into frontline social worker services, creating an **additional 20 social worker posts**. These extra posts will:
- Reduce caseloads to a manageable number of no more than 1:15
 - This will enable social workers to do the quality work with families and children
 - In turn, this will enable us to manage risk, safely leading to fewer children on Child Protection plans and to fewer children being taken into care and families able to stay together safely
 - Provide manageable caseloads which make social workers feel safe.

6. Policy Changes

- 6.1 We are updating our relocation policy to ensure that we are able to support people who want to move into the Dorset area, but who are unable, or who do not wish to purchase a property. The updated scheme will enable us to offer relocation assistance based on property rental rather than purchase.
- 6.2 We are applying the key worker recruitment and retention bonus scheme for Level 2 and Level 3 social worker appointments, effective from 1 April 2018.
- 6.3 The scheme is payable to the sum of £2000 for each employee who remains in the same Children's social worker Level 2/3 position for a continuous period of 24 months.

6.4 The first payments would be due in April 2020.

7. Recruitment & Retention Plan

7.1 The full range of interventions and activities are contained within the Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Plan 2017/18 (see Appendix 1)

7.2 The plan will be updated for 2018/19 to include a review of the new recruitment campaign, impact and effectiveness of the key skills bonus and the improved relocation package

8. Summary and conclusions

- Children's social work is a "sellers' market"
- Councils have to compete for the supply and for the best quality social workers
- It is important therefore to have and maintain a competitive "offer" and to become an employer of choice.
- Manageable caseloads reduce third party costs (<25% of the cost of children's services is social work)
- Continuity and consistency of relationships between workers and children/families is essential
- The County Council has taken action to become an employer of choice

Nick Jarman
Interim Director for Children's Services
January 2018