

**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

*To:* **Audit and Accounts Committee**

*Date:* 23rd September 2014

*From:* LGSS HR Advisory

*Electoral Division(s):* **All**

*Purpose:*

This report was requested at the last Audit and Accounts Committee. The Committee had previously expressed concern that the lack of key worker housing was a contributing factor in not being able to recruit social workers. Members remained concerned at the risks faced by the Council in relation to recruitment and requested a follow-up report from Human Resources on Countywide risks relating to recruitment, whether these are increasing and the actions being taken to address them.

The purpose of this report is to outline the challenges the authority is currently facing when recruiting and retaining Social Workers and experienced Care Managers. It explains the action being taken to address the issue and outlines further work being undertaken to successfully attract and retain newly qualified, experienced Social Workers and experienced Care Managers.

*Key Issues:*

The authority continues to find it difficult to attract and retain experienced Social Workers and Care Managers resulting in vacancies and increased costs for agency workers.

*Recommendation:*

- a) That the Committee notes the issues and recognise the challenges and the work being taken to address recruiting additional Social Workers and experienced care managers.
- b) To consider whether to refer the report on to the Children and Young People and Adults Committees for any further consideration.

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## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The recruitment of Social Workers and experienced Care Managers has always been a challenge for the Council, but more recently this has become increasingly difficult, resulting in higher agency costs and the loss of some staff to neighbouring local authorities and agencies. The general issue of the recruitment of Social workers and Care Managers is a national issue affecting almost all local authorities.
- 1.2 The high level of media scrutiny of serious cases and the critical view on the social care profession has a detrimental impact on the number of entrants to the social work profession, and in retaining qualified staff.

## **3.0 Impact on services**

- 3.1 In the last 12 months Children's Social Care has recruited 30 qualified social workers. However, 57 have left, requiring the engagement of 26 agency staff which is a cost pressure, due to the higher rate of pay for agency staff.
- 3.2 In the last 12 months Adult Social Care and Older People's Services have recruited five qualified social work staff and 12 have left the service, and in addition to existing vacancies, 17 agency workers have been engaged.
- 3.3 The cost of agency staff is one consideration for the services, in the month of August 2014 £218,000 was spent on social care staff across Children, Families and Adults directorate. The nature of agency workers means there can be higher turnover and therefore less continuity for families and services users. However, such usage is unavoidable in order to maintain safe levels of care and an appropriate level of knowledge and experience

## **4.0 Action taken:**

- 4.1 The Council has taken a number of actions to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers and care managers and reduce spend on agency staff:
  - Engaged only one provider for agency staff, to provide a single contact for managers and more favourable terms, with a contract until 31st August 2016.
  - Sought to create a positive environment for social workers to practice. The recent Ofsted inspection reported that "social workers feel safe, secure and valued which allows good safeguarding social work to flourish".

- The imminent implementation of the “Transforming Lives” change programme for Adult Social Care will change the structure to better support social work practice with adults and older people.
- Placing an emphasis on workforce development. For example, in addition to the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) offered to all newly qualified social workers, Children’s Social Care currently have 50 social care staff undertaking specialist systemic training alongside the suite of training offered to support individuals in their operational role. Adults services offer a suite of training directly linked to the operational functions of the care management role and in addition, offer post qualification opportunities accredited by a university and the opportunity to become a fully qualified social worker. Transforming Lives will see a further offer of development programmes particularly around managing risk and difficult conversations.
- seeking to deploy agency staff effectively, Ofsted recently reported that the authority “uses agency social workers in a positive and constructive way to back fill vacancies, cover maternity leave and support newly qualified social workers until they have sufficient experience to carry more complex cases and in ensuring that they have a safe place to start to practice”.
- The Embedding of the Unit Model in Children’s Social Care now better supports social workers and their practice.
- A high emphasis placed on exit questionnaires and interviews to establish why employees chose to leave their employment.
- Reviewed the way the authority words its adverts in comparison to other organisations on job sites, e.g. using engaging information about the local area.

## **5.0 Further work**

5.1 Further work is being undertaken to improve recruitment and retention including:

- Work is being undertaken to compare salaries in Cambridgeshire with neighbouring counties to ensure pay levels are competitive. Whilst the staff development offer can address the recruitment and retention issues to a certain extent, salary is a key factor.
- Regional work is taking place with other local authorities to consider arrangements to better manage collectively the cost of employing agency staff
- Regular reviews of starter and leaver numbers and comparisons to the number of applicants and new starters gained through

recruitment campaigns will inform changes in trends and recruitment and retention strategies.

- The Council is working to identify further creative solutions and approaches to ensure Cambridgeshire is an attractive employer and clearly advertises to prospective employees its benefits and total reward package.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
None	