

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **28 January 2011**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Report on the Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers**

Purpose of report: **To provide an overview report on the social work workforce**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Panel is recommended to note the progress made in implementing the recruitment and retention strategy

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 There are no financial implications in the report.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The report on Social Work, Recruitment and Retention is attached as Appendix 1. The overarching recruitment and retention strategy is attached as Appendix 2.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the current profile of the workforce and endorse the maintenance of a rolling recruitment and retention programme, paying particular attention to the recruitment of experienced Social Workers and Senior Practitioners.

MATT DUNKLEY
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Sally Carnie – Head of Looked After Children's Services

Local Members: All

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Recruitment and Retention Report to CPP

1. Introduction

1.1 The development of the East Sussex social work recruitment and retention strategy was a direct response to Lord Laming's report 'The Protection of Children in England: A progress report 2009'. This strategy is the working document which summarises the five core aims and objectives that underpin all recruitment activity. The various aspects are monitored, coordinated and evaluated by the social care recruitment and retention group, which is chaired by the Head of Service LAC. In order to maximise the supply of social workers the strategy relies on multiple recruitment initiatives. Social work recruitment remains a very significant concern for local authorities, many of which continue to experience difficulties in stabilising their workforce.

2. Current vacancies

2.1 East Sussex, however, has made considerable progress in both recruiting and retaining social work staff. When the last report was prepared for the Corporate Parenting Panel in 01/09 there was evidence of progress being made, but there remained 35 social work vacancies on the front line. There are currently 11 social work vacancies and 6.5 senior practitioner vacancies across the entire service. In addition there are a further 11 candidates from within the current staff group short-listed for senior practitioner interviews due to be held at the end of January.

3. Workforce data

3.1 The workforce data presented to the recruitment and retention group reinforces this picture showing that there is an established flow of social workers into the authority and greater retention amongst social work staff once in post. In 01/10 there was an average of 121 social workers in post whereas there are currently 145. Each leaver from the authority is invited to an exit interview. The results of these interviews are collated and presented to the recruitment group with an analysis of any emerging themes. The attrition rate is currently 2.7%, this compares well with the overall Children's Services rate of 3.7%. The workforce data produced by HR in relation to the age profile of the social work population shows that there is a significant proportion of the workforce who are 55+ years. The recruitment group is currently making plans to address this potential loss of very experienced social workers. Hence the recruitment challenge for the next 12 months will be how to secure a balanced level of experience in the inflow of social work staff to complement the existing cohort.

4. Recruitment initiatives

4.1 One of the most effective routes for recruitment is through delivery of good quality, supportive social work placements to student social workers. Currently East Sussex has 80 students on placement. Effectively this gives East Sussex an opportunity to influence the development of the students and to encourage the highest calibre recruits to join the authority.

4.2 In the spring of each academic year representatives of the recruitment group attend all final year groups at both Brighton University and the University of Sussex.

4.3 This is followed by a jobs fair, which is open to both newly qualified social workers (NQSW's) and qualified staff.

4.4 Throughout the year the recruitment group also runs three or four national campaigns using web based recruitment, local media, press releases etc.

4.5 In addition the 'grow your own scheme' has been a highly successful method of recruiting to the east of the county, which traditionally can be very challenging. This scheme enables the Children's Services to identify unqualified staff who may have the necessary attributes to become a social worker and then sponsor them through a training programme.

4.6 There has been some international recruitment of Canadian social workers. This however has proved very disappointing and has only produced 4 new candidates to date. The recruitment group is currently undertaking a review of this contract with SWIIS, particularly in light of the new limits imposed by the government in regard to the issuing of work permits. The fees relating to this contract are not effective until any new recruit has successfully passed their probationary year.

4.7 Finally, one of the most recent initiatives to be taken forward is the delivery of an in-house return to work programme. This is particularly geared up to prepare experienced social workers, who may have taken time out of the profession, to prepare for interview and become familiar with any changes to practice or legislation.

4.8 No one initiative alone will deliver the necessary recruitment inflow with the range of experiences required, as indeed the international recruitment initiative has shown most graphically.

5. Retention

5.1 The recruitment group has found that one of the most important aspects of retention has been access to good quality post qualification training, supervision and support. The social work education and training team has recently been reorganised and is currently managed within Children's Services. This has enabled the department to get a greater congruence between the operational priorities and the delivery of social work education and training. There have been improvements in the induction and support offered to staff taking on new roles and responsibilities. Both the induction programme for NQSW's, and the action learning programme developed for new first tier managers, have been revised in line with feedback from staff. In addition there is an extensive post qualification programme delivered through the local universities which is of an exceptionally high quality.

5.2 There has been a dramatic rise in activity in both Child Protection and LAC work. There are currently 633 children with a CP plan and 568 LAC. This represents a rise of 13% over the last 12 months. Inevitably the management of these increased workloads for social workers remain a critical issue in relation to retention. Access to the types of training and support outlined above will mitigate the potential for 'burn out' to some extent. However, the increased numbers of social workers retained in the cohort clearly have the greatest impact on the workloads held across the service. The senior management team analyses the caseload data on a monthly basis and there is clear progress in reducing workloads to more manageable levels.

6. Conclusion

6.1 It is very clear the success of social work recruitment and retention in East Sussex has been delivered by using a range of initiatives to meet the differing needs of teams with different demographic priorities in the county. The rolling programme of recruitment and retention will need to be maintained in order to stabilise the workforce at full capacity. The greatest challenge remains the recruitment of experienced social workers to replace the cohort reaching retirement age. The recruitment group will need to pay particular attention to this and target their recruitment and retention accordingly.

Recruitment and Retention report to CPP

Social Worker and Senior Practitioner Recruitment and Retention Strategy **for East Sussex Children's Services**

The recruitment and retention strategy for social workers and senior practitioners has five main aims.

Aim 1

Ensure there is effective workforce planning in order to achieve the right supply of social workers and senior practitioners to meet service needs.

Actions

- To set up a sub group of the departmental Recruitment & Retention Working Group for Social Care Recruitment and Retention (SCRAR) including setting up new terms of reference. SCRAR will be chaired by Sally Carnie and supported by Lucy Morgan-Jones. Membership of the sub group to include, social care operational managers, a social worker and senior practitioner and PAT.

Aim 2

Attract high quality social workers and senior practitioners to work for East Sussex Children's Services.

Actions

- To have a designated manager with accountability to build good relationships with the HEI's and Universities, participate in the strategic development of Social Work training programmes and ensure links are maintained with trainee social workers in order that newly qualified social workers are attracted to work for East Sussex Children's Services.
- Children's Social Care Management Team (CSCMT) agree to prioritise opportunities for social work placements. SCRAR to monitor the provision of statutory placements and selection of trainee social workers for placements.
- To action a rolling social worker and senior practitioner recruitment campaign led and co-ordinated by SCRAR. This will result in a move away from individual social work teams advertising posts unless there are exceptional circumstances. Specialised campaigns may be required for certain localities or teams.
- SCRAR to receive quarterly workforce data from Personnel and Training (PAT) to inform recruitment and retention initiatives. This will need to include succession planning.
- SCRAR to link with the departmental communications manager (Iain Luxford) to agree opportunities for raising the reputation of East Sussex Children's Services as the place to practice social work
- SCRAR to review recruitment and retention incentives in light of workforce planning data and make proposals to CSCMT.

Aim 3

Ensure social workers and senior practitioners are inducted, supported and offered continual professional development.

Actions

- Agree an induction and support programme for newly qualified social workers, and newly appointed staff. This should also incorporate the specific needs of social workers who have qualified in other countries.
- CSCMT agree the principles for a “protected caseload” for newly qualified social workers and maximum caseload for social workers.
- CSCMT implement recommendations emerging from CSCMT supervision audit to ensure high quality supervision is offered to all social care staff.
- SCRAR consider developing a “career pathway programme” for aspiring senior practitioners and practice managers based on rotation between social work teams to support identified development and service needs.
- SCRAR to review provision of Post Qualification (PQ) and specialist training opportunities, and make recommendations to CSCMT

Aim 4

Ensure effective “Grow Your Own” social worker schemes are in place.

Actions

- SCRAR to review current ‘grow your own’ schemes and make recommendations to CSCMT which should cover career structure and processes:
- Processes for the identification of suitable staff currently working in Children’s Services
- Marketing of non-social work qualified posts as a career pathway into social work profession.
- Consider whether to establish a “return to social work scheme”

Aim 5

Recognising and Valuing the Social Care workforce.

Actions

- CSCMT to consider the use of appropriate merit payments for staff who have gone over and beyond what would reasonably be expected
- Assistant Director, Children & Families to consider appropriate and ongoing communications with the social work workforce that recognises their achievements
- SCRAR to consider any other ways to recognise the achievements of the social care workforce including social activities