

TITLE	Recruitment and Retention of Social Worker Staff
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 January 2017
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Judith Ramsden, Director of People Services

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

A permanent and stable children's social care workforce is important for delivering improved and good quality services to children and their families.

Local Authorities have to rely upon mixed economies which include interim and agency staff to provide flexibility and maintain service coverage but the degree of interim staff needs to be managed in order to promote stability.

RECOMMENDATION

For overview and scrutiny to note the report and the action taken by children's social care and HR to manage the workforce and recruit staff permanently.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report outlines a snap shot of the data regarding staff turnover and the management of the workforce.

It outlines the actions taken by senior leaders to improve the recruitment and retention of staff against a challenging national climate of a shortage of qualified social workers and managers, increasing risk and responsibility placed upon these professionals and a national picture of salary and benefits lagging behind other professions.

It is highly important to note that despite challenges in the recruitment and retention that a good level of quality services continues to be delivered to children and their families in Wokingham.

Background

Wokingham is one of the smallest unitary authorities in England. The Children's Social Care department had 66 permanent members of staff who are social work qualified and HCPC registered as of November 2016.

The October 2016 snap shot for returns on staff data demonstrated:

- 16% of social worker have been at Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) in excess of 5 years and this indicates that the staff are increasingly experienced in

comparison to year 2015/16.;

- The vacancy rate is 26% which is a slight deterioration from last year and at the October snap shot we held an additional two posts vacant which had not been filled by agency or permanent staff.
- The turnover rate is 26% in comparison to 30% last year and this is a small improvement on the figures for 2015.
- Staff absence from work has also improved from a rate of 3.0 in 2015 to 2.5 and absence rate is linked to a few staff with serious illness. There is evidence that social workers are not absent from work in any form which should give cause for concern for the department's systemic wellbeing. The agency rate in 2015 was 23.0 compared to 16.0 which is an improvement with less agency staff being employed.

The turnover of staff in the summer has been impacted by the need to address poor performance and HR issues which have led to staff exiting WBC. There has also been the departure of 4 social workers who have moved on for personal family reasons or promotion. A level of turnover is inevitable in any local authority social work department with research demonstrating that staff across the profession can tolerate between 3 and 7 years frontline practice before the need to move posts.

The small numbers in the workforce will cause percentage calculations to swing in a way that is not useful to senior leaders in understanding the challenges of workforce development. In reality we need to recruit to approximately 10 vacancies.

The Authority finds itself in a challenging situation for social work recruitment, set against a national shortage of qualified social work staff and located within the area between the London Boroughs and amongst the six Berkshire unitary authorities all in close proximity. The general shortage of professionals means that social workers are actively sought by authorities and social workers have choices between the authorities. This means that movement for the purposes of professional or personal change, to seek increased pay and benefits or to provide a break in service, is more highly possible in this area.

The local authorities are also competitive needing to attract the available candidates and this leads to a constant increased revision of pay scales and retention schemes by each unitary in order to attract the pool of social workers living within Berkshire and commutable distances.

Wokingham has a small workforce. The monitoring of vacancies and reasons for turnover are overseen through reporting by HR and the principal social worker. The figures for 2016/17 for social work turnover are 26.0 reduced from 30.0 but this remains indicative of increased workforce turnover in comparison to the national average of 16.0. Wokingham Children's Services department have refreshed and reviewed the Retention and Recruitment Strategy to continue to manage the workforce issues.

Recruitment and Retention: Methods and Approaches

Social Work Campaigns

Wokingham has a lot to offer as an authority in which to practice and develop as a professional social worker. The department is on a trajectory to 'Good' having been inspected a year ago. This is an important feature which shows practitioners that Wokingham is a stable and safe place to work. The work load is balanced and appropriate and the training opportunities are substantial through the Innovation Programme and the Practice Framework.

With this in mind and the need to drive towards a more permanent stable workforce, a new social work advertising campaign is being developed in partnership with Jobs Go Public. A microsite has been developed and the campaign is due to go live early January 2017.

There are eight social work vacancies across the teams, one Assistant team Manager Post, two Team Managers posts and a Service Manager post. The campaign aims at targeting specific areas for social work recruitment including surrounding authorities of Hampshire, Surrey and London Boroughs. For hard to recruit posts such as management roles, we are using the smart search process which is effectively head hunting of suitable candidates.

The campaign is created with a message that is positive, highlighting the significant benefit to working in Wokingham. The current benefits are outlined in the refreshed recruitment and retention strategy and include proposals for retention bonuses for staff at all front line operational levels.

The approach of succession planning and growing staff has been developed throughout local authorities and Wokingham is no exception. In order to achieve this there are a number of avenues, such as;

- use of the 'Step Up' programme in partnership with Winchester University,
- a strong ASYE programme following recruitment of newly qualified social workers
- Sponsorship of existing unqualified staff through the social work degree in exchange for a commitment to post qualification employment.

A partnership has been developed between Wokingham and the University of Winchester. There is collaboration with other southeast authorities surrounding the university. In the Berkshire area most authorities are in the University of Buckingham partnership.

Each year Wokingham offers a number of student placements for step up. In 2015/16 we offered three placements, of which two were taken up. The experiences of the step up students indicate that the offer provided by Wokingham Borough Council as an employer and learning environment is a positive one. The step up programme is also a valuable source of recruitment. The programme trains students who have already completed a first degree. Therefore the candidates are usually of a strong academic ability and often with increased maturity.

It is proposed that Wokingham increases the offer of step up places to five per year from 2018 as a trial. The advantage of this is that we can go on to train and then offer employment to 'step up's' as newly qualified staff to our vacancies. In November 2016 a conversation with Hampshire, as part of the bid to continue the step programme, has agreed to aim for four step students in the interim.

There have been two employees sponsored on the Open University programme in 2015/16. An in house sponsored member of staff has just finished the programme and is now an ASYE in a front line team with a seamless return into work. Two further staff should graduate in 2019, and a further staff member is being interviewed by the OU for a start in January 2017.

There is a cost of £12000 for each sponsorship. However Wokingham continues to receive the benefit of the candidate's employment between placements, and their work as student within our own social work teams. The use of this approach has to be highly selective due to the costs.

A further option which is being explored is the potential for supporting staff through a Master degree programme, which is a two year course and takes advantage of prior degree learning.

Succession Planning for Existing Staff

Through the Innovation programme with the DFE, Wokingham is to be involved for phase two of the programme. It is hoped that formal notification of this from the DFE will occur in January 2017.

Within this implementation of sign of safety and the Practice Framework, we are committed to a training and development programme for our Managers and Practice Leaders. This includes specific and bespoke adult learning to develop competence in delivering, modelling and leading staff through the Practice Framework.

A scoping exercise is being undertaken with the Principal Social Worker (PSW) to look at aspiring manager and manager training in leadership and management qualifications. For the tasks faced by senior managers in a modern children's services department, the ability to think strategically and to manage projects, especially those which involve multi agency or departmental tasks, indicates that project and programme management qualifications and skills are necessary in preparing middle managers for the 21st Century Council Model. The exact requirements and programme are not yet defined but a decision will be forthcoming in early 2017.

The purpose of succession planning and career pathways is a necessary method of developing our workforce into the next generation of managers. It promotes stability and assists with developing a culture within the department of staff trained in the vision and goals of the organisation.

In addition we provide bespoke return to social work training for those who have taken a career break and there are plans to consider offering a 12 week course to potential staff who have not yet applied for a permanent post. This idea is in its infancy and needs

further development.

Conclusion

Wokingham is a small authority and requires a mixed economy to ensure recruitment is achieved from a number of sources:

- Advertising and campaigns for qualified social workers focused in specific areas.
- Use of smart search for key posts such as middle managers
- Recruitment by offering employment to a proportion of step up students with the overall step up placements increased to five.
- Sponsorship to be offered using a strict selection process.
- Further exploration of the use of a Master’s degree route.
- Succession planning for staff at all levels to ensure a clear career pathway and additional technical training such as programme management and leadership skills are available in order to grow our own sustainable workforce.

The pay and benefits will need constant revision. The once attractive security and benefits of pension and absence leave is no longer attractive to staff as the rates of pay that can be earned through agency work far outstrips these benefits, leaving agency workers not only paid on a better hourly rate, but able to buy personal pension and health cover and still earn a higher salary. Whilst there is a national shortage of social workers there will always be the need for agency workers and this will always challenge the ability to recruit a permanent workforce.

The senior leadership team are actively managing these challenges and continue to look at creative ways to attract staff to work and stay in Wokingham.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Not applicable		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Not applicable		

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Not applicable		
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Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
n/a

List of Background Papers
None

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Date 28th December 2016

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Version No. 1